



*Popular Culture and World Politics*

# **MODERN DYSTOPIAN FICTION AND POLITICAL THOUGHT**

**NARRATIVES OF WORLD POLITICS**

Adam Stock



# Modern Dystopian Fiction and Political Thought

Over the past few years, “dystopia” has become a word with increasing cultural currency. This volume argues that we live in dystopian times, and more specifically that a genre of fiction called “dystopia” has, above others, achieved symbolic cultural value in representing fears and anxieties about the future. As such, dystopian fictions do not merely mirror what is happening in the world: in becoming such a ready referent for discussions about such varied topics as governance, popular culture, security, structural discrimination, environmental disasters and beyond, the narrative conventions and generic tropes of dystopian fiction affect the ways in which we grapple with contemporary political problems, economic anxieties and social fears.

The volume addresses the development of the narrative methods and generic conventions of dystopian fiction as a mode of socio-political critique across the first half of the twentieth century. It examines how a series of texts from an age of political extremes contributed to political discourse and rhetoric both in its contemporary setting and in the terms in which we increasingly cast our cultural anxieties. Focusing on interactions between temporality, spatiality and narrative, the analysis unpicks how the dystopian interacts with social and political events, debates and ideas. Stock evaluates modern dystopian fiction as a historically responsive mode of political literature. He argues that amid the terrors and upheavals of the first half of the twentieth century, dystopian fiction provided a unique space for writers to engage with historical and contemporary political thought in a mode that had popular cultural appeal.

Combining literary analysis informed by critical theory and the history of political thought with archival-based historical research, this volume works to shed new light on the intersection of popular culture and world politics. It will be of interest to students and scholars in literary studies, cultural and intellectual history, politics and international relations.

**Adam Stock** is a Lecturer in English Literature at York St John University, where his research is concerned with narrative and political thought. He uses interdisciplinary methods to explore how narrative and form can be mobilised to make political arguments; using this lens, his primary research interests are in Utopian Studies and Science Fiction. He also works on literary modernisms, particularly considering temporalities, provinciality and ruination. Some of his previous work has been funded by the AHRC (as Co-Investigator on the early career exploratory award *Reconfiguring Ruins*) and by the Leverhulme Trust (as Network Facilitator on the *Imaginaries of the Future* project). He has published articles and chapters on dystopian narratology and on writers including John Wyndham and George Orwell. He serves as Hon. Treasurer of the Utopian Studies Society (Europe).

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### **Modern Dystopian Fiction and Political Thought**

Narratives of World Politics

*Adam Stock*

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# **Modern Dystopian Fiction and Political Thought**

Narratives of World Politics

**Adam Stock**

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**To my mum, Lisa Stock**

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# Acknowledgements

This book project began from an interest in the relationship between literary form and political argument: just what is it that the novel or short story enables a writer to do that cannot be done with (say) an article in a magazine or a philosophical treatise? What are the parts an academic monograph cannot reach?

Political questions are clearly central to utopian and dystopian fiction. When I began postgraduate research I learned in addition that utopian thinking is vital for politics that are inclusive, sustainable and go beyond mere piecemeal tinkering. The process of research and writing this work has been one of transformational education, and I am greatly indebted to those I have learned from in both formal and informal contexts, including teachers and students, friends and family, supervisors and mentors, collaborators and colleagues across several fields. Indeed, there is in truth no such thing as a single authored academic book. Not only does the production process itself require many hands whose work is often unacknowledged, but the “author function” of the text is part of on-going social processes and interactions with the world. The work represented here developed over a number of years, it is my hope that tensions between some of the sections presented (and even within individual chapters) are productive.

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# Introduction

## In dystopian times

On Monday 27 April 2015 Comedy Central's flagship programme *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* reported on protests in Baltimore, Maryland over the previous weekend. The protests were organised by local communities in response to the death of Freddie Grey on 19 April 2015 a week after he sustained severe spinal injuries during an arrest and subsequent transportation by Baltimore Police. Support for the demand for justice was growing and on 25 April over 1,000 protestors marched on City Hall, stopping to stage a "die-in" on route (NBC News 2015). Despite receiving national coverage since before the announcement of Grey's death, there was no rolling coverage of the 25 April protest by the mainstream media, whose luminaries were gathered only 40 miles away in Washington DC for the annual White House Correspondents' Dinner.

To satirise the media's apparent indifference to the events in Baltimore in favour of a night of self-congratulatory entertainment, *The Daily Show* segment featured "senior civil unrest correspondent" Jessica Williams dressed as the character Effie Trinket from director Gary Ross's 2012 film adaptation of Susannah Collins's young adult dystopian novel *The Hunger Games* (2008). "Our hearts go out to Baltimore and all of District Seven", Williams began in a caricatured upper-class English accent, "so filled with grief at the death of so many tributes..." By explicitly comparing racialised police violence with the story world of Collins's dystopian future imaginary, Williams's skit narrated an important point about the lived experience of African-Americans in the here and now: *we live in dystopian times*. The skit drew not only on a dystopian image, but also (implicitly) on a dystopian *narrative*. It is the relationship between the strategies such narratives employ and political thought with which this book is concerned. Modern dystopian fiction often projects action forwards into the future in order to look back toward the present, self-reflexively emphasizing the question "how did we get here"? In her sketch Williams repurposed the futurity of dystopia as a hermeneutic tool in order to show that for many people the present world is already full of the injustice, powerlessness and violence seen in a future-set fiction. I suggest that such

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dystopian narratives are also historically aware, responding to present conditions and informed by knowledge of historical events and traumas.

To state that we live in dystopian times is not to make the facetious argument that some predictions of past dystopian fiction have proved narrowly true.<sup>1</sup> This statement is instead intended to recognise that a specific genre of fiction called dystopian has, above others, achieved symbolic cultural value in representing fears and anxieties about the future. Dystopian fiction has become a point of reference for discussions about governance, popular culture, international relations, security, racial discrimination, policing, environmental concerns and much more besides: it is almost as likely to be found on nightly current affairs programmes or in journalists' commentary as on the blurb of any number of novels, video games, TV shows or films. Whether it is used to describe existing conditions by current affairs pundits or by comedians to satirise them, the common recourse to the term "dystopia" suggests an unusually strong and productive relationship between a cultural genre and political life. The study of dystopian narratives may therefore help us to reach a richer and more nuanced view of politics, as well as achieving greater understanding of this literary genre.

The official UK parliamentary debates transcript Hansard records the first use of the word "dystopian" in governmental politics in a Commons debate on Irish Land Tithes in 1868, when philosopher and MP J. S. Mill used the term to describe government plans he felt were "too bad to be practicable" (in a speech in which he notably also defended both the principles of colonialism and the British response to the Great Famine in Ireland).<sup>2</sup> Mill's inventive coinage played on common understandings of "utopian" as its antonym, well before the word "dystopia" found currency as the name of a literary genre. In the contemporary world however, to call something "dystopian" is a more specific rhetorical manoeuvre; effectively stating that something is similar to a specific generic type of narrative fiction. In other words, it is to seek to explain political events by comparing them to a type of popular cultural narrative (the dystopia).

This being so, I argue that dystopian narratives are a form of *political* and *politicised* writing. As rhetorical structures they can help readers to think about political questions of their day through a generic narrative framework, and because of their obvious political engagement they can and have been appealed to in wider arguments both in everyday life and in the media. Moreover, by providing a rhetorical framework for discussions about world-changing issues, the dystopian imaginary can conceivably influence how politics is debated and thereby the parameters of what is – or can be – discussed. As Alex Adams argues with reference to cultural representations of torture, "the relationship between politics and fiction is not merely one of mutual reinforcement: cultural representations are active participants in the production of political discourses" (2016, 3). From this premise I use dystopian literature to investigate cultural and political questions. The value of such literature in hermeneutic terms is that it mediates between past, present and

future: grounded in anxieties of their present, these political engaged narratives mobilise knowledge of historic events and traumas to speculate upon consequences of current trends and actions for the future. I trace a history of modern dystopian fiction to learn more about the political upheavals, social crises and cultural anxieties which provide the context in which such literature is produced, and how they in turn perceive past experiences and possible futures alike. I contend that such texts provide an opportunity for us to enrich our understanding of the competing ideas at play during these historical moments.

It is important to note at the outset that the term “dystopian” was not widely used during the period I am investigating as it is now.<sup>3</sup> In a sense, we cannot now help but reach for dystopia as a hermeneutic tool to read twentieth-century history. The narrative conventions of dystopian fiction are frequently mobilised in cultural, critical and media discourse on any number of issues. Although it is a legitimate scholarly goal to read historical situations using the contemporary lens of dystopia (see for example Claeys (2017); Lothian (2016); and Varsam (2003)), my approach has a subtly different (though by no means wholly incompatible) emphasis because I am interested in dystopia as a historically mediated and evolving concept. This is one of the novel aspects of the present study. Focusing on *narrative strategies* alongside cultural and intellectual history, I show how a series of authors engaged with international politics in their dystopian works.

I begin from a concern with narrative because as Shepherd (2013, 3) argues, “our cognitive frameworks are (re) produced in and through the stories we tell ourselves and others. We glean ideas and ideals about the world and our place in it from the stories we are told; we reproduce these ideas and ideals in the stories we tell”.<sup>4</sup> An implication of Shepherd’s point, and a corollary of the statement that dystopian narratives are both political and politicised, is that story telling is itself not a politically neutral act: not only do such stories have political content, but there are ideological implications to all narrative forms. Notwithstanding that dystopian narratives can be found in a variety of media and cultural forms, during the period I focus on they are primarily found in novels, and the novel is, as Lennard J. Davis (1987, 5) has it, “a cultural phenomenon with certain overt aims and a hidden agenda”, as well as being a historically contingent form. In addition to being concerned with what dystopian fiction can tell us about the conditions of its production, then, I also want to advance an argument about the politics and ideology of the formal elements of such works. It is not precisely that dystopian fiction is a form of political theory as the latter is commonly understood, but rather that it is a cultural (and hence ideological) form which shares resonances with political theory in terms of the issues, fears and anxieties to which it responds. Both, after all, are historically situated. Shepherd (2013, 9) goes as far as to suggest that, “we might learn as much – if not more – about political process and practice from popular culture as we do from political science textbooks”. Such artefacts cannot stand in place for theory, nor could we learn much at

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all about political thought from fictional narratives without an existing understanding of politics which in turn requires other forms of study and/or reflection upon practice. Nevertheless, while some of the analytic rigour one might expect from a work of pure theory is unlikely to be present in *any* twentieth-century genre fiction, such works often feature productive ambiguities, a multiplicity of voices or astute observational detail which are achieved through narrative strategies not available to (say) the academic genres of research monograph or textbook writing.

The ideological narrative that this book articulates is expressly utopian: by inscribing a story about how a variety of dystopias from the past attempted to map the dark horizons of what were imaginable and intelligible futures I want to show that it is important to read such texts from a position that operates against the foreclosing of political possibility. As a form, dystopia can express negativity without hopelessness. This makes the ideological implications of dystopian narrative strategies especially significant. Drawing on Ernst Bloch's transhistorical concept of the "utopian impulse" through which some cultural artefacts – whether or not formally (concerned with the) utopian – express an "active" form of political desire for a better world, Alexis Lothian has recently suggested a concomitant "dystopian impulse". She terms this "a negative critique that seeks to dissolve presumptions that the present's political problems are eternal and inevitable, even when the contestation consists of railing against present wrongs without any suggestion of a positive outcome" (2016, 448). This is not to deny that there are numerous examples of literary dystopias that acquiesce with the terrors and inequalities of the present, or promote the worst excesses of capitalism as "natural" and even desirable. But Lothian's queer feminist reading of dystopian narratives is immensely helpful in its relentless insistence on complicating and disrupting "too-easy narratives of hope and progress, highlighting their complicities and disappointments" (469). Accepting dystopian negativity to understand the structural inequalities of past and present does not foreclose the possibility of utopian hope, but rather demands that hope is utopian, performing what Levitas (1990) terms the "education of desire".

#### **Interdisciplinarity and method**

From the outline above it should be clear that elements deriving from several different disciplines are being put to use here: the notion that cultural representations (re) produce political discourse, now commonly found in International Relations and political analysis more generally, is foundational to both poststructuralism (e.g. Foucault) and early work in Cultural Studies (e.g. Stuart Hall). My emphasis on the inter-relations of cultural and intellectual history might be described as owing a debt to cultural materialism, and in highlighting the ideology of dystopia as a literary form I draw on insights of Marxist literary critics such as Fredric Jameson (1971). Within this scope of literary studies, I employ tools from narratology to stress the centrality of

issues surrounding narrative and genre. These varied elements are brought to bear on an object of study – dystopia – that historically developed through the prism of Utopian Studies. While historically speaking literary scholars have dominated Utopian Studies numerically, the discipline also numbers within its ranks important theorists of sociology, political science, history, geography, fine art, architecture and more besides.

Drawing on such a hodgepodge of theories and disciplinary perspectives inevitably throws up contradictions and puzzles at times. My hope is that these are productive for the reader to engage with. This book is underpinned by interdisciplinary ideas, and as such, in the dialect of the region in which I grew up, is *not one thing nor t'other*. I follow here the suggestion of Huotoniemi *et al.* (2010, 80) that “interdisciplinarity is... best understood not as one thing but as a variety of different ways of bridging and confronting the prevailing disciplinary approaches”. Each discipline has its own separate demands on conceptual apparatus and even writing style. Dialogue between disciplines of the type attempted here can produce new and surprising results, but confronting and negotiating the challenges of moving between disciplinary perspectives can be fraught with difficulty at times too. Freud’s well-known term *unheimlich* can be translated as “unhomely” rather than “uncanny”, and I sometimes experience such an “unhomely” feeling when working in interdisciplinary contexts which test comfort zones and disciplinary assumptions, estranging familiar ideas.

My method centres on close reading a series of dystopian texts from (roughly) the first half of the twentieth century. Alongside this, I carefully consider contextual evidence, especially that which can help me to address how a specific type of narrative genre fiction interacts with critical theory and political thought contemporary to its day. My intention is to show how the interactions of popular culture and world politics are of mutual significance and influence to both camps by effectively working at the interstice of cultural and intellectual history, and employing insights from a variety of other disciplinary perspectives. Most importantly, perhaps, is the broader political and social historical backdrop against which the development of the dystopian genre takes place. From crises that acted as precursors to the First World War to the cementing of Cold War discourse around the questions of difference and the global threat of nuclear winter, in the chapters that follow I explore relationships between dystopian fiction as it developed across the period 1909–1955 and rapid material changes with which it dealt, was affected by, reproduced and at times even began to influence.

## Locating dystopia, defining dystopia

As a literary genre dystopia is often highly conventional, easy to recognise, and yet strangely difficult to define. Indeed, some existing critical definitions of “dystopia” do not really deal with it as a narrative genre of fiction at all, but rather as a type of “world building”, imagined place or community.<sup>5</sup> A



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central contention of this book is that only by unpicking these texts in narrative terms can we fully assess both the ideology of the form and their historical importance as discursive interventions in world politics.

As narrative fictions dystopias are structured around events. Mieke Bal (1997, 7) argues that any event within a narrative text always “takes up *time*” and must “occur *somewhere*”, which is to state that central to any such text are the describable “elements” of time and space. In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Mikhail Bakhtin argues that the novel may be defined by the way it treats what he terms “time space” or “the Chronotope” (84). Bakhtin’s remarkably broad definition of “the novel” stretches to include ancient Greek Romances, and has been criticized on the grounds that for him what defines novels is effectively the “absence of any peculiar feature” as they are “mobility made flesh” (Pavel 2003, 206). Nevertheless, the concept of the chronotope is of value here for defining dystopian fiction because of the way it locks together time and space in the novel as a form of literary representation. Indeed, Bakhtin’s primary application for the chronotope is as an ideological formation of space in the novel where events occur. Such spaces are typically split into specific categories such as the road, the drawing room and so on. It is the events and movements occurring within them that structure a space and these chronotopes are therefore moments of ideological formation (Zoran 1984, in Wei, Bizzocchi, and Calvert 2010, 5): spaces remaining open to certain possibilities and closed to others. Using the concept of the chronotope allows us to work with the dystopian space as something that exists in dialectical formation with the dystopian narrative. Hence, for example, Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not only defined by the international rivalry of the mega-States of Oceania, Eastasia and Eurasia or the image of a “boot stamping on a human face – for ever” (Orwell 1989, 280), but also by two alienated characters (Winston and Julia) committing a minor rebellion by entering into an unsanctioned sexual relationship. As I show in chapter seven, the latter plays a key role in driving the narrative, and even when sections of Goldstein’s book of political theory, “*The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*” are reproduced in the novel, the narrator regularly intrudes to highlight that Winston is reading it to Julia in their illicitly rented bedroom: individual experience of the everyday is closely intertwined with political theorising.

Brian Attebery (1992, 12) uses Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) concept of the “fuzzy set” to describe fantasy literature. Notwithstanding minor issues Farah Mendlesohn (2014, 62–65) productively outlines, Attebery’s manoeuvre is suggestive. Previous attempts to map dystopian fiction have tended to focus on boundary lines, but adapting Attebery’s framework would suggest value in looking instead for a central hub of strongly dystopian characteristics and practices, and more “fuzzily” dystopic texts radiating outwards. This approach permits concentration to rest with the arrangements of time and space in dystopian fiction. This is especially important for Part Two of this book, in which I deal with dystopian allegories that differ formally in

important respects from the more well-known and strongly dystopian fictions of Zamyatin, Huxley and Orwell. Indeed, following Attebery's (1992, 1) concentric schema of mode, genre and formula, we might read allegories of authors like Rex Warner and Margaret Storm Jameson as part of the dystopian mode, while dystopias such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World* achieve something closer to a formula. One advantage of such an approach is that analysis is based in the interpretation of existing texts and can therefore adapt to include creative new uses of the genre, rather than attempting to outline effectively deontological categories into which new examples must be made to fit. In their *Concise History of Science Fiction*, Bould and Vint (2011, 5) centre historical development and the relationship of SF to the social and scientific world, to treat SF as "a fuzzily-edged, multidimensional and constantly shifting discursive object". Here I want to take a similarly historical approach to the question of what sorts of texts may be productively read as definitively dystopias or more broadly dystopian, with the caveat that much as Hollinger (2014, 147) argues for the continued importance of narrative to the SF mode which reads much of the modern world as "science-fictional" so too, from our "dystopian times", can we emphasise the continuing importance of narrative to dystopia.

I have already mentioned the importance of the relatively simple plot to a reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* centred on political thought. Orwell's novel is a great example of common strategies that dystopian narratives follow to order arrangements of time and space. It has become moreover something of an ur-text for the dystopian genre (see Stock 2015a).<sup>6</sup> Orwell's text strips back the "formula" of the dystopian storyline to some of its most basic elements. For example, the novel begins *in medias res* and, as Tom Moylan notes (2000, 147), it adheres to the typical narrative of dystopian fiction focusing on the growing alienation of an individual protagonist or small group of individuals who begin to rebel against prevailing conditions. Additionally, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* follows the generic convention whereby the "action leads to a *climactic* event that does or does not challenge or change the society" (148). This type of "parabola" to use Attebery's (2013) term (which he insists differs from a "story arc") is a means of engaging with contemporary cultural fears and social anxieties. If the modern dystopia is, in Moylan's (2000, xi) words, "largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century", then it behoves us to reflect upon what the terrors of the twentieth century can tell us about dystopia. To return to my earlier point, then, we can use dystopian fiction as a hermeneutic tool to read about the conditions of their production along with the changing nature of social experience. This is to state that historical conditions are not merely a backdrop to such fiction, but intimately bound up with its production, forming part of a "terrain of 'exchange', 'negotiation', 'resistance' and 'incorporation' where the construction of the political and the type of politics it engenders are formed" (Grayson, Davies, and Phillpot 2009, 156; citing Storey 2006, 1–12).

## 8 Introduction

The investigation of time and space as central principles organising dystopian narratives reveals further details of the political and politicised nature of such writing for which I have argued. I have additionally suggested that careful close reading and contextualisation of dystopian fiction can improve our understanding of both political thought and the genre itself. To further explain how dystopia engages with historical conditions now requires a brief outlining of the literary and intellectual history from which it emerged.

### Historicising dystopia

The analysis here proceeds from the premise that these dystopian fictions are novels of ideas engaged in forms of political critique and satire. As Gregory Claeys (2017) has shown,<sup>7</sup> dystopian fiction developed from a post-Enlightenment tradition that ran through social and political thought of the Victorian era and into the work of writers like H. G. Wells. At the formal level, the use of fiction to critique social and political relations was widely practised during the “Republic of Letters”. Indeed, the rise of the novel occurred more or less concomitantly with the growth of Enlightenment thought. By using the form of the dystopian novel however, authors critiqued some of the very conditions and assumptions of the post-Enlightenment tradition from which they emerged. For example, one may frequently find in dystopian fiction of the first half of the twentieth century an opposition to discourses of certainty, and in particular the political discourses of historical meta-narratives. Such meta-narratives had been especially powerful in the Victorian era, but the epistemology underpinning them can be traced back all the way through the Enlightenment and beyond to the emergence of Cartesian rationalism of the seventeenth century, as well as the “new science” of utopian author Francis Bacon.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1943) Frankfurt School theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno contend that the central problem with Enlightenment rationalism is that it can (and *did*) so easily become an end in itself, in which the human costs involved in the means are ignored. The quest for certainty and the emphasis on reason over emotions and rhetoric can easily lead to the narrowing and even shutting down of debate rather than opening it out. For these theorists, “[t]he program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997, 3). From as early a thinker as Bacon, however, the quest of “the human mind... to hold sway over disenchanted nature” was a quest for power that would hold sway over people as well. Just as *knowledge* of nature was a means to control nature so too, Adorno and Horkheimer argue, did this knowledge change relations between men: “technology is the essence of this knowledge” they write, and “[p]ower and knowledge are synonymous” (1997, 4). Adorno and Horkheimer assert that natural philosophy, which they see as emblematic of the Enlightenment, has been channelled into the dominance of men over

humankind and the rationality upon which it was based has been narrowed into instrumental means.

Adorno's understanding of utopia is indebted to Ernst Bloch's treatment of utopian desire as central to human experience. Ruth Levitas (1990, 88) explains that in distinguishing between "concrete" (meaning "anticipatory") and "abstract" (or "compensatory") elements, for Bloch "the task is to reveal and recover the anticipatory essence from the dross of contingent and compensatory elements in which utopia is dressed up in particular historical circumstances". In the "hermeneutic sense" that Bloch treats utopia, it becomes "a way of thinking and of reading" (Freedman 2000, 62–63). For Adorno this hermeneutic must be grounded in what he terms a "negative dialectic". As Fredric Jameson (1971, 58) explains, "a negative dialectic has no choice but to affirm the notion and value of an ultimate synthesis, while negating its possibility and reality in every concrete case that comes before it". Adorno therefore asserts that utopia can only be approached through the negative, and it is revealed to be a most precarious concept: to touch utopia is to break it, and yet to deny it and turn away from the utopian impulse would be an act of the worst imaginable cynicism.

As Ernst Bloch noted in a conversation with Adorno for radio broadcast in 1962, Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) was written "during the period when British Imperialism was beginning" (Bloch and Adorno 1988, 4). The development of the western utopian literary tradition kept pace with the growth of European colonialism over the ensuing centuries, and often did little to hold to account either the values or the worst excesses of colonial projects. During the eighteenth century, Bloch asserts (3), the *topos* of utopia moved out of space and into time. Due to advances in scientific and technical knowledge, the "evident possibility of fulfilment" of utopian dreams coexisted with the "just as evident" contradictory belief in the "impossibility of fulfilment", and so, Bloch argues, people were compelled to "identify themselves with this impossibility and to make this impossibility into their own affair. In other words, to use Freud, they 'identify themselves with the aggressor' and say that *this should not be*" even while knowing "it is precisely *this* that *should be*" (4). On the one hand then, lies utopianism as "social dreaming" (Sargent 1994, 1), an urgent form of desire for a better world (see especially Levitas 2013). On the other hand lie the concrete examples of literary utopias, informed by this desire and critical of the present and yet limited by the very same conditions of their production. Thus, for example, in William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1889) the protagonist William Guest awakes two hundred years into the future. As Marcus Waithe (2002, 460) explains, "where the British Empire of Guest's time promotes a mixture of individualism, free-market liberalism and traditional class hierarchy, so... Morris' utopia celebrates communality, equality and decentralization. Yet even as an expression of 'notness', *Nowhere* remains intimately related to British society".

The emergence of the modern form of dystopian fiction at the turn of the twentieth century owed much to developments in the utopian literary form

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which immediately preceeded it. Richard Widdicombe (1990, 93) explains that many fin-de-siècle utopias “foreground – almost wilfully it would seem – not the reducibility of meaning to some easily comprehensible Utopian didactic message but, instead, the impossibility of textual resolution”. Waithe likewise contends that “the fact that the story is told from indirect experience”, points to William Morris being “unwilling to present any one voice as an irreproachable key to textual meaning. Nowhere as a whole is founded upon similarly devolved principles, upon an unwillingness to enforce an ‘unvarying conventional set of rules by which people are judged’, upon the desire to avoid centralization of meaning” (Waithe 2002, 463).

While the utopian literary form was traditionally didactic, the resistance to monovalence and closure which characterised many late Victorian utopian imaginaries was also used by H. G. Wells in his scientific romances of the 1890s, in which “the refusal of generic expectation is key to the didactic effect of Wells’s fantastic fiction” (S. J. James 2012, 39). Through his engagement with science, and especially Darwinism, Simon James asserts that Wells could “assail the authority of language to describe the world” (41). The limits of political discourse are reflected in an attitude toward the fantastic which frequently and consistently undermines a sense that the presentation of the narrative is in any way objective:

The texts’ scepticism towards written language naturally extends inwards to the language employed by the texts themselves... The apparent mimesis of an alternate reality by Wells’s scientific romances in particular can only ever be partial, since language has not yet evolved sufficiently to characterize that which has previously been outside experience. By disclosing itself as fantastic, the text declares itself as necessarily a fragment.

(S. J. James 2012, 45–46)

Widdicombe (1990, 94) therefore suggests that what frequently seems to be narrowly didactic and concerned with static anthropological description on the surface level is in fact marked by fragmentation and *aporia*, that is an “impasse beyond which interpretation cannot venture, a state of hermeneutic blindness before the abyss of meaning”.

### Emergent structures

Such fragmentation is key to what I term the presentation of the *future-as-past* in dystopian fiction.<sup>8</sup> Typically, such texts project their treatment of social and political issues into a narrated future, from whence they can look backward toward the (authorial) present in fragments littered throughout the story. I assign the term future-as-past to mean the period between the authorial present and the principal narrated future. Within this period, fragments of ironic and contested “historical” narratives, to which I assign the term *future-history*, engage the reader in a creative reconstruction of the path

from the authorial present to the dystopian society. Thus in Orwell's *Nineteen Eight-Four* the years between 1949 (when the novel was published) and 1984 (when the action is principally set) form the *future-as-past*. Specific events in the time frame 1949–1984, such as an atomic bomb falling on Colchester, or Winston's childhood memories of his mother, comprise points of narrated *future-history*. The importance (and novelty) of drawing a distinction between these two temporal fields is that such dystopias almost never present a full and comprehensive historical narrative of how the future setting came into being. Instead, they provide just sufficient information for the reader to be able to creatively piece together a historical narrative through contextual knowledge and guesswork. This narrative strategy functions as a rhetorical device, which draws the reader into creative reconstruction of a fuller and comprehensible future-history.

It is worth emphasising that in line with the application of a “fuzzy set” definition of the genre, this narrative technique may be described as *characteristic* but not *definitive* of dystopian fiction. Hence, in some of the more allegorical novels which are dealt with in chapter four like Rex Warner's *The Professor* (1938) the framework of the future-as-past can do little by itself to improve our understanding, whereas in others such as Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) or Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937) it is central to the way the novel engages with political thought. Divergent strains of dystopian fiction emerge as the genre develops in the first half of the twentieth century, and if the genre is to be defined by a centre as I have argued rather than by strict boundaries then the relationship between these texts should be understood as dynamic and responsive. Indeed, nor could it be otherwise when these texts engaged in social and political critique at a time of revolution, war and social upheaval.

I want to further suggest the lines stretched between these narratives are threads of nascent and emerging political consciousness. In the course of social and political investigation, these dystopian fictions do not discuss social experience as a static, reified, neatly conceptualised whole, but rather as a process, an evolving part of present, lived experience or a “structure of feeling” in Raymond Williams's term, which he defined as

Specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating continuity... a social experience which is still *in process*, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies.

(R. Williams 1977, 132, emphasis in original)

The dystopian fictions analysed in the following chapters grappled with moral, social and political problems by viewing them not only in relation to

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their past but also to a future which paradoxically both construes and resists the idea of historical necessity. They express negativity without hopelessness. These texts have divergent politics and emphasise different issues in response to (and in turn informing) a rapidly changing world. Nevertheless, close reading and attention to both context and narrative strategies such as the exposition of the future-as-past will expose multiple facets of, in Williams words, “a social experience which is still *in process*”. Dystopian fiction of the early to mid-twentieth century was timely, it was political, and reading it as offering negative critiques of the present can work to counter ideological positions that foreclose the future.

### Overview

The analysis here proceeds in roughly chronological order of publication of my primary texts. Part One deals with texts from 1909–1932. The first chapter makes a case for the inter-relationship of political and aesthetic concerns in reading the genre through close reading of an early example of the modern dystopian form. The argument re-contextualises E. M. Forster’s “The Machine Stops” (1909) as an intervention in international politics by addressing two European scandals which defined the first decade of the twentieth century: the Eulenburg Scandal in Germany and the Dreyfus Affair in France. These scandals typified the post-Darwinian European racial degeneration anxieties of the *fin-de-siècle*, and the significance of my reading lies in showing how Forster brings the two affairs together to present them in a new light. I argue that Forster uses the dystopian short story form to affect a radical and provocative political critique, which opposes the increasingly bellicose rhetoric of pre-WWI European empires by critiquing their then hegemonic models of masculinity using queer and Jewish characters.

Chapter two moves the discussion of political and aesthetic concerns to a more theoretical level. Critical work on Zamyatin and political thought has tended to focus on Hegel, but here I provide a reading of Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* (1999) grounded in his engagement with Immanuel Kant’s aesthetic theory as a means of critiquing both post-Revolutionary Russia and the industrial capitalism of Western Europe. Central to Zamyatin’s critique are those aspects of the contemporary world common to both East and West, such as the deployment of the industrial “time management” techniques of Frederick Winslow Taylor in mass production. For Zamyatin, political and aesthetic theory alike is imbricated in the expressly dialectical process of world historical change. His work attempts to counter impulses of historical foreclosure through orientation toward future revolutionary agency. In critical terms, meanwhile, he uses dystopian fiction as a vehicle to comment on a variety of interests in popular culture such as the new cinema in addition to political concerns such as labour relations, and the politics of (heterosexual) sexual desire.

Chapter three deals with Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) as a text in which a modernist concern with formal experimentation is used in conjunction with dystopian generic conventions for both critical and satirical purposes. Huxley had spent time in Mussolini's Italy and had followed with concern the first wave of show trials in Stalin's Soviet Russia. Written during the Great Depression not long after he had visited towns with mass unemployment in Northeast England, Huxley directly engages with academic debates in such varied areas as entomology, economics and psychology, mixing this with the comedy of farcical sexual mores and social codes. Taken together, Forster, Zamyatin and Huxley's texts show how the developing genre relied on literary experimentation alongside generic convention. The arrangements of (narrative) time and space in these texts offer a flexible discursive framework with which to deal with historical change, mediating between past, present and future.

Having mapped a few key texts in the development of the modern form of dystopia, Part Two explores (mostly) lesser-known novels from the 1930s to 1940s, including some which occupy spaces in dystopia's "fuzzy" hinterlands. I thereby chart the reach and range of dystopia as a political discursive mode. Chapter four begins by further unpacking some of the ways in which dystopia can be considered both political and politicised writing via an exploration of allegory and allegorical criticism that moves beyond dominant understandings of symbol and allegory as oppositional. To flesh out this argument I examine works by Margaret Storm Jameson and Rex Warner as anti-fascist allegories by writers of the independent left. These works are expressly political interventions in the fulcrum of 1930s politics, responding directly to the ascendancy of the Nazi party in Germany and the spread of fascist politics elsewhere in Europe.

Chapter five builds on this study of allegory to examine published works and archival manuscripts by Katharine Burdekin, which have never been discussed before in print. Beginning with the specific context of recent historiographical debate on fascism as a "political religion" in relation to the views of key Nazi ideologues, I examine how dystopian fiction can help to tease apart the nexus of (political) myth, ideology and utopia in political theory. As with the previous chapter, the relationship of aesthetics to politics in the context of anti-fascist writing is central to analysis. Here I am particularly concerned with the importance of contending political romanticisms that draw upon idealised concepts of the pastoral, which risk playing into the same "aestheticisation of politics" which Walter Benjamin once argued reached its apotheosis in fascism (see Hillach 1979).

Chapter six serves as a bridge between Parts Two and Three. In it, I examine some dystopias from around the time of the Second World War to show how authors used this literary mode as a means of historical reflection on developing crises. Texts by Karin Boye, Storm Jameson, Rex Warner and Aldous Huxley address the relationship between history and political thought, often attempting to turn discussion of politics into questions to be



answered via psychology and psychoanalysis. This retreat to the personal is not always productive. With Huxley especially, the shift from political questions to those dealing with present-orientated spirituality and individual fulfillment threatens to result in historical closure. In chapters four through six then, investigation of the patterns, strategies and structures of primary texts in conjunction with conditions of production reveal how dystopian narratives can help us to better understand political thought in relation to history.

Part Three opens with a narratological discussion of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) which aims to re-think some of the politics of the novel. Orwell pursues separate narrative strategies in each of the novel's three parts in order to explore the intersection between the global and the everyday lived experience of the individual, embodied subject in the early years of the Cold War.

In the years immediately following publication of Orwell's work the effects of both science fiction and dystopian narratives for the understanding of cultural, political and historical change begin to be felt in the realm of formal politics. Chapter eight focuses on the postwar work of John Wyndham, such as his 1955 novel *The Chrysalids*. Drawing on archival research, I read this work in the context of the nuclear anxieties of the Cold War, the ascendancy of McCarthyism and the birth of the Church of Scientology. In an era of such profound social and cultural anxiety, dystopian fiction was the mode par excellence for cathartic cultural assimilation of the threat, and a viable discursive apparatus by which to assess political responses to such a climate.

These chapters are far from exhaustive; many other examples of dystopian fiction from the first half of the twentieth century could have been chosen in place of each examined here. In trying to keep discussion focused on themes and anxieties which belong to a particular structure of feeling I have chosen mainly – though not exclusively – works by English writers. This leads to slightly uneven coverage of the development of the genre in some respects, but my hope is that the structure of feeling I identify in these texts justifies their selection. To analyse novels in sufficient depth, some limits, however arbitrary, had to be imposed. By the end of the 1950s the emergence of “New Wave” science fiction, political developments including the American war in Vietnam, and changing social attitudes (for example, in relation to race and gender) begin to shift the uses of the dystopian genre in new directions, which it would not be possible to cover adequately here. What I hope the discussion can instead do is to cast light on some imaginaries of dark futures past that belong to roughly the first half of the twentieth century. I view these as of central importance to understanding what it means to state that we live in dystopian times.

## Notes

- 1 Such a strategy is adopted, for example, by Francis Fukuyama (2002, 4–6) in his discussion of technology in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) in order to examine biotechnology.

- 2 See *Hansard Commons* 12 Mar. 1868, vol. 190, c. 1517. On early uses of “dystopia” see also Sargent (2010, 4, 26–27).
- 3 The development of the dystopian genre was first charted in works such as Kingsley Amis *New Maps of Hell* (1975 [1960]), Chad Walsh, *From Utopia to Nightmare* (1962) and Mark Hillegas, *The Future as Nightmare: H. G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians* (1967). As Fitting (2010) notes, such works displayed “a tendency to conflate anti-utopia and dystopia, describing science fiction as predominantly pessimistic” (141). While Krishan Kumar (1987) still used the term “anti-utopia” rather than “dystopia”, attempts at more precise and usable definitions are developed in Lyman Tower Sargent (1994) (and see also Sargent (2010)), who concentrates on ideational content rather than form or narrative. Further important work on definitions and development can be found in Keith M. Booker (1994); Fredric Jameson (1994; 2005); Tom Moylan (2000); Philip E. Wegner (2002); and Gregory Claeys (2010; 2017). In addition there are several useful chapters in the Baccolini and Moylan (eds) volume *Dark Horizons* (2003) including (but not limited to) those by Darko Suvin (187–201), Peter Fitting (155–166), and Philip E. Wegner (167–185). The volume edited by Eckart Voigts and Alessandra Boller (2015) is also worth mention in this context.
- 4 One moment in which this insight becomes especially important below is during the discussion of allegory and symbol in chapter four.
- 5 For Darko Suvin (2003, 189), for example, the dystopia “is a pretended eutopia – a community whose hegemonic principles pretend to its being more perfectly organized than any thinkable alternative, while our representative ‘camera eye’ and value-monger finds out it is significantly *less* perfect than an alternative, a polemic nightmare”. See also Lyman Tower Sargent (1994, 2010), Gregory Claeys (2010, 109) and Krishan Kumar (2013). Critics who do make narrative a feature of their definitions include Tom Moylan (2000) Raffaella Baccolini (2000) and Fredric Jameson (1994).
- 6 This is not to state that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the most interesting or best-written dystopia, however.
- 7 Claeys’s *Dystopia: a Natural History* (2017) was published too close to the completion date of the manuscript of this volume for the sort of in-depth engagement that such an important text deserves to be included here.
- 8 In this section I draw upon a previously published article (Stock 2016) in which I more comprehensively map out and compare the narrative strategies of the *future-as-past* and *future-history* in texts including *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Huxley’s *Brave New World*, Burdekin’s *Swastika Night*, E. M. Forster’s “The Machine Stops” and *The Chrysalids* by John Wyndham.

# 1 “Troubles began quietly”

## Tensions of emergence in E. M. Forster’s “The Machine Stops”

### Introduction

The apparently straightforward plot and superficial didactic message of E. M. Forster’s “The Machine Stops” (1909) masks a series of remarkable contradictions and ambiguities, which forestall interpretation. Even the title exudes uncertainty: figuratively “machine” is a metonym for any efficient system or organisation, while in the more literal sense it is (usually) something with a moving mechanism. The nature of the titular Machine becomes more uncertain, however, when considered in conjunction with the word “stops”. Like a church organ, a “machine” may have mechanical “stops” which allow certain parts to move when needed, but then again the entire device may – as part of its function or not – arrest in its movement completely. For example, a moving truck should ordinarily stop when the brake pedal is pressed. Failure to stop could signal a (potentially catastrophic) mechanical fault. On the other hand, if the cam belt snaps the truck will likewise judder to a halt. While the titular Machine does break down irrevocably in the narrative, Forster’s title does little to definitively foreshadow anything, and instead forestalls interpretation.

This interpretive difficulty suggests Forster’s choice of narrative form (the dystopian short story) might hide more complex and provocative political content than at first appears. I contend that here such content cuts to the quick of *fin-de-siècle* cultural anxieties bound up with empire and masculinity by positing a queer futurity in challenge to then dominant positions. To make this case, this chapter begins by considering the question of literary periodisation as one that brings together aesthetic concerns with political issues – a question with resonances for the whole genre. Consideration of literary context reveals how Forster’s narrative strategy deals critically with fears of racial degeneration, derived from social Darwinism, which formed part of a perceived crisis in the physical condition of working-class Edwardian British men. Further historical contextualisation can then tease apart the text’s fragmentation and aporia to reveal more radical insights. Here I turn to the queer theory of José Esteban Muñoz alongside the work of Forster’s contemporary Edward Carpenter in order to read the story as an intervention in international political debates surrounding

the Dreyfus Affair in France and the Eulenburg Scandal in Germany. These cases were of tremendous symbolic importance in the lead up to the First World War. In this context Forster valorises the othered "cosmopolitan" identities of Jewish and queer figures against the European imperialist order, constructing a queer futurity to counter the hegemonic model of masculinity of his age.

### Arrested development

The resistance of the title to immediate comprehension has both political and aesthetic (narrative) consequences. The reader is induced to participate in an act of narrative world building from the very first sentence through direct address: "Imagine, if you can, a small room, hexagonal in shape like the cell of a bee" (Forster 1954, 109). As several critics have noted, this apiary imagery is overtly political.<sup>1</sup> But no sooner has the narrator demanded the reader engage in building a narrative world with an explicitly political form than the change of tense at the conclusion of the opening paragraph from present to past signals an end to the mapping out of the political space of a "cell" as part of a framing narrative. From here on information will be strategically withheld until such time as it serves a specific purpose.

The story traces the relationship of Vashti and her adult son as he begins to resist the passive, isolated life which the Machine provides and eventually ventures out of his part of the global subterranean hive to explore the Earth's surface, widely thought to be uninhabitable. The Machine captures him and he is threatened with expulsion (and hence death). But in the third section of the story Kuno calls his mother across the world to tell her – rather more clearly than the title indicates – that "the Machine *is stopping*, I know it, I know the signs" (emphasis added). Faced with the world-destroying concept of mechanical failure, her immediate response is to "burst into a peal of laughter" as she finds the notion "absurd" (Forster 1954, 139). The Machine orders her existence, and is the means by and through which she apprehends and even perceives the world. The reader, aware already that Kuno's contact comes in the context of "troubles" which "began quietly, long before she was conscious of them" (138), understands what the failures in the Machine's function represent even as Vashti continues to plead ignorance, but only because we have just been told what "the signs" represent by Kuno. In Tom Moylan's words, "the narrator formally signifies the existence of a reality outside the parameters of both the Machine society and the surface enclave of the Homeless" (2000, 159). The narrative voice opens up a gap between the information available to the reader and that known to the characters themselves, and importantly alerts the reader to the gap. This gap is sustained until the close of the narrator's "meditation", when Kuno and Vashti are reunited just in time to see the final, total breakdown of the Machine when an airship crash causes the entire underground network they are in to collapse inward.

In some ways, then, the reader is directed toward a specific interpretation; but, as with the tensions in the title, at other moments the text implements a strategy which Richard Widdicombe (1990, 93) has labelled "aporia", or the "obstruction of meaning" and "impossibility of textual resolution". Widdicombe notes that the story's "didactic message, founded on Protagoras's adage 'Man is the measure [of all things]', warns against succumbing to 'the terrors of direct experience' and the seductiveness of 'tenth-hand' ideas, warns against mediation of all kinds, but does so through a text marked by superfluous mediation" (1990, 95). The arresting of the interpretative process in what Ralph Pordzik (2010, 56) terms Forster's "textual machine" through "a deliberate act of concealment" opens the text to multiple readings, for example as queer (Pordzik 2010), Hegelian (March-Russell 2005), liberal post-Darwinian (Jonsson 2012) or as propounding anti-scientism (Walker 2007). It is this very openness that makes it so difficult to pin down, not least because like some of the 1930s dystopian allegories examined later in this book, the text exceeds allegorical readings.

### **Periodising the Machine: Georgians, Edwardians, Victorians**

"The Machine Stops" is similarly resistant to easy periodisation. However, I argue that this literary question offers a way in to political issues which are otherwise obscured by the text's aporia. In a 1924 essay Virginia Woolf arranged "Edwardians and Georgians into two camps; Mr Wells, Mr Bennett, and Mr Galsworthy I will call Edwardians; Mr Forster, Mr Lawrence, Mr Strachey, Mr Joyce, and Mr Eliot I will call the Georgians". Quoting this passage, David Bradshaw goes on to state that "while shoehorning [Forster] into the canon of high modernism alongside Eliot and Joyce now seems more than a touch audacious, his various affinities with the writings of Lawrence, Strachey, and Woolf are obvious enough" (Bradshaw 2007, 5). Elsewhere in the same volume, Dominic Head argues that "the preoccupation with the fantastic suggests that Forster has affinities with Kipling as a short story writer, rather than with the technically more innovative modernists, such as Joyce, Mansfield, and Woolf" (Head 2007, 78). The differences between "high modernist" groupings here serve to show the instability of the modernist canon and definitions of the avant-garde, and point to Forster's fluctuations on aesthetic questions. David Medalie (2002, 1) correspondingly terms Forster's work "reluctant modernism". Some important characteristics associated with modernist literary writing can indeed be found in the story. For example, free indirect speech is used in novel ways, the narrative is concerned with time and memory, and, with the "re-establishment of religion" (in which the Machine is "worshipped as divine"), Forster (1954, 136–37) satirises religious urges. Yet at the same time, it is also very much an Edwardian story that looks backwards toward nineteenth-century naturalism and Head (2007, 87) accurately observes that the tale has "the quality of parable" about it, placing

it of an age with novels like G. K. Chesterton's *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904).

In other ways, Forster's story seems to be a relic from a bygone age due to some important thematic concerns usually associated with the late Victorian era. In part, this is because as Forster claimed in his 1947 preface to his *Collected Short Stories*, "The Machine Stops is a reaction to one of the earlier heavens of H. G. Wells" (1954, 6). This, I suggest, is only partly the truth of the matter: one can perceive the influence of some of Wells's early "scientific romances" in the text as easily as works like *A Modern Utopia* (1905), and the reaction of Forster is by no means entirely negative. In Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), for instance, future humanity evolves into two races – the child-like, effeminate surface-dwelling "Eloi" (descendants of the late Victorian bourgeoisie) and the animal, predatory "Morlocks" (descendants of the working class) who live underground. In "the Machine Stops" there likewise appear to be two populations (although they may not be separate species). Firstly, there are the inhabitants of the Machine, represented by Vashti (but not Kuno), who is depicted as "a swaddled lump of flesh – a woman, about five feet high, with a face as white as a fungus" (Forster 1954, 109).<sup>2</sup> The second group is alluded to only briefly. Kuno tells Vashti that the last thing he sees when he visits the surface of the Earth before a "horrible... long white worm" connected to the Machine (133) captures him and drags him below ground is a woman: "she came to my help when I called... she too, was entangled by the worms, and, luckier than I, was killed by one of them piercing her throat" (134). In combining a hellish image of a return to the womb (the worm as umbilical cord) with an image of sexualised death (the worm penetrating and killing the woman), the Machine acts as a sort of psychotic parental figure who keeps Kuno from meeting his potential mate. "The Machine Stops" is hence a neurotic tale, torn between naturalism and modernism. It mediates between dominant cultural and political neuroses of Georgian, Edwardian, and late Victorian eras through engagement with Darwinism.

### Degeneration fears

In *The Time Machine*, Wells' splitting of humanity into two separate species is explicitly grounded in the biopolitics of the *fin-de-siècle* when the Time Traveller states: "even now, does not an East-end worker live in such artificial conditions as practically to be cut off from the natural surface of the earth?" (Wells 2005c, 48) The fact that in terms of both physical appearance and temperament Kuno sits somewhere between the surface and underground groups is likewise important in the political and scientific context of degeneration fears.

These fears played on cultural understandings of evolutionism for which, since the 1870s, "Darwinism" had become a catchall name: as Peter Bowler has stressed, before the twentieth century "the term did not denote a

commitment to the Darwinian theory of natural selection" (2003, 179). The theory of natural selection as described by Darwin is nature's trial and error approach to population variation. By favouring at the population level useful variations (i.e. those that help life forms to best adapt to their environment and reproduce), natural selection "does not positively produce anything. It only eliminates, or tends to eliminate, whatever is not competitive" (Flew 1984, 25). In strictly Darwinian terms, this means nature has no *telos* and humankind does not represent an end point. In the late nineteenth century however, this element of Darwinism was misused or misrepresented in two important ways: firstly, attempts were made to apply Darwinian theories of population change on the evolutionary timescale to both socio-economic groups and individuals, and secondly attempts were made to preserve humankind's privileged position at the summit of all creation (and thereby the need for a benevolent Creator). The first type of misuse helped to justify reading imperialism (in the context of the "scramble for Africa") as well as class structures in biopolitical terms, while the second type gave credence to an argument that individuals who enjoyed social and economic success were morally superior. If the most prosperous were identified as the "fittest" and best adapted for survival, then the most vulnerable – especially those reliant upon charity – represented a dangerous social "residuum" (to use investigative journalist Henry Mayhew's 1840s term). Dorothy Porter (1991, 160) stresses that the idea of the poor being a "race apart" is pre-Victorian (and hence pre-Darwinian) in origin but nevertheless, "by the close of the century, this supposed 'race apart' had been given formal and prominent status within the new discourses of degeneration and eugenics." What the social Darwinism of the *fin-de-siècle* did was to suggest that "the so-called 'race apart' might be but the tip of the iceberg of degenerates, a vast horde of the unfit dragging the nation down into inevitable biological decline and final extinction". This was brought sharply into focus in the aftermath of the failure of the British to recruit sufficient physically fit volunteers during the Boer War.<sup>3</sup>

While the turn of the twentieth century saw the founding of the eugenics movement by Darwin's cousin Francis Galton, the story world of Forster's tale turns eugenics on its head as in "it was a demerit to be muscular. Each infant was examined at birth and all who promised undue strength were destroyed" (1954, 124). Jonsson (2012) reads Forster as a true Darwinian who understood the biological subtleties in play, but the exposure of healthy infants surely makes a satirical point here: Forster's story world has successfully "solved" the problems of both the social "residuum" and European competition in empire expansion. The physical strength formerly required for labour and violence is now therefore a demerit. This is not Darwinian selection, which operates on evolutionary timescales over many millennia (as Wells depicts in *The Time Machine*), but rather the logical consequence of following social Darwinism, which promises to rid society of an exploited class on which the creation of wealth is dependent. To appreciate the force

and *subtlety* of Forster's political critique requires engagement with Wells's novel as a central intertext.

### Queer futurity

Kuno, who rebels first by undertaking a regime of exercise to increase his strength, provides a characteristically ambiguous critique of this social Darwinian entropy. He is a creature out of time and place, and notwithstanding Forster's own homosexuality it is precisely because Kuno so ill-suits the society into which he is born – both temporally and spatially – that queer theory seems an obvious means of approaching the construction of his character. As José Esteban Muñoz (2009, 1) puts it, "queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world". Kuno represents Forster's attempt to reach beyond what Muñoz terms "romances of the negative" (*ibid.*), and he does so in a Lefebvorean fashion, by reaching back toward a romantic past in order to create his utopian dreams for a different way of life (see Coleman (2015, 21)).

Pordzik makes a persuasive case that a major source for this romantic queer futurity in Forster's story is the work of Edward Carpenter. A radically utopian thinker and devotee of Walt Whitman, Carpenter mixed in anarchist and socialist circles but is best known for his essays advocating the legalisation and acceptance of gay love as a question of both politics and morality: in *Homogenic Love* (written 1894, but first published in revised form in the larger *Love's Coming of Age* (1908)) he produced, as his biographer Sheila Rowbotham notes, "the first British statement by a homosexual man, linking emancipation to social transformation" (Rowbotham 2009, 189–90)). Forster was certainly aware of Carpenter's work by the time he wrote "The Machine Stops".<sup>4</sup> I argue that Forster's story echoes Carpenter's refutation of the "contemporary panic about a supposed 'degeneration' mysteriously emanating from a miasma of urban slum-dwellers, criminals, decadent artists, mystics and homosexuals, insisting that the nervous troubles of many homogenic men arose from their social predicament rather than from their sexual inclination" (Rowbotham 2009, 191).

Using an ironic mode in which the social mores advocated by conservative commentators were followed to their terrible logical conclusion, Kuno becomes a vehicle for advocating a different path of social evolution: literature becomes a means for saying what cannot be said openly in public political debate without breaking social mores. As Pordzik states, Forster's "intriguingly evasive narrative style" hereby reveals meaning "through an act of concealment" (2010, 54, 56). In his critique of social Darwinism, the turn to Carpenter represents not a turn away from Darwinism, but rather a *queering* of biological theory at its interstice with politics. In his 1908 essay collection *The Intermediate Sex*, Carpenter lays out a theory that "might best be called nonheterosexual evolutionary democracy. Drawing on a Darwinian model of sexual selection, the tract posits 'Urnings' – a term for homosexuals



Carpenter derived from the works of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs – as signs of social evolution” (Bredbeck 1997, 32). The influence of Carpenter is particularly noticeable in Forster’s posthumously published *Maurice* (2005 [1971]), written after the two met in 1913. Gregory Bredbeck argues that Edward Carpenter, in common with Forster’s eponymous character Maurice, “fetishize[d] the homosexual, positing him not as the debased other, but as the valorized other” (1997, 34). Such “bifurcation” is likewise apparent in “The Machine Stops” where Carpenter’s conception of homosexuals as socially evolved “teachers of the future” on matters of love can be seen in the presentation of Kuno (Pordzik 2010, 62).

### Threatening masculinity

In establishing his case for a queer reading of the story, Pordzik points to the unusual names of the characters Vashti and Kuno. As he notes, “Vashti” is the name of the aging wife of the Persian King Ahasuerus in the Book of Esther who refuses the drunken King’s request to appear before his guests at a feast. Esther is Vashti’s successor as Ahasuerus’s favourite queen. Pordzik draws attention to Esther’s position as “closeted” in terms of her identity as Jewish, and he further suggests that Kuno, who *delays* telling his mother about his alienation and trip to the surface until she agrees to visit him, may be read as occupying a similar role to the Biblical Esther: by remaining “in the closet”, Esther gains “the most powerful form of political influence imaginable in the given context. At the end she determines the fate of her own people and that of her enemies alike. Her example thus seems to say: ‘if you come out of the closet, you fail; if you do not, you win’” (2010, 59). More accurately, perhaps, both Esther and Kuno come out when they calculate it to be politically effective.<sup>5</sup> There is however an important structural difference between the two texts: in the Book of Esther the reader is aware, thanks to Esther’s uncle Mordecai, that she is Jewish from early in the text. In other words, tension in the story arises from us knowing what the king does not. In “The Machine Stops” we do not learn about Kuno’s trip to the surface until he discloses it to his mother, and tension arises from this narrative delay.

Given these complicating factors, further evidence to solidify the queer reading of Kuno can be found in the provenance of his name (a move which Pordzik oddly does not make). Around the time that Forster was writing the story in 1907–1908, a major scandal in the military aristocracy was dominating politics in Germany. As Norman Domeier (2014, 738) explains, the trouble began when Maximilian Harden, editor of influential journal *Die Zukunft*, accused “Prince Philippe Eulenburg, a close friend and influential adviser to Kaiser Wilhelm II, of heading a homosexual clique within the imperial government... Driven by notions of excessive and unnecessary pacifism, the policies of this clique had driven Germany into international isolation”. In attacking this clique, Harden used homosexuality “as a weapon in the struggle for the remasculinization of German politics” (739). At the

epicentre of the scandal was Eulenburg's relationship with General Count Kuno von Moltke, municipal commandant of Berlin. Harden had obtained "intimate letters" from the "Liebenberg Dining Circle" or Camarilla, as the group of friends around the Kaiser were known (named after Eulenburg's castle). In these letters von Moltke was called "'sweetie' (*Süßer*) and 'old badger' (*Alter Dachs*); and their mutual 'sweetheart' (*Liebchen*) was none other than Kaiser Wilhelm himself" (Domeier 2014, 740). Von Moltke challenged Harden to a duel, and when Harden refused he attempted to have Harden prosecuted under criminal libel proceedings. When this course failed he took Harden to court in a civil suit. As *The Manchester Guardian* presented it on 28 October 1907 (7–8), the trial was effectively turned into a competition between two types of masculinity. Dr von Gordon, prosecuting for von Moltke, argued that radical "Intellectuals" such as Harden, "played no part in the political struggle" and asserted that they had "used weapons in this fight... [that were] unfair". In front of an aristocratic judge, the lawyer effectively relied on class: the common radical was making baseless accusations about his social superior. Harden's lawyer, meanwhile, defended him by insisting that, "men, real men, should and must be the Kaiser's *entourage*". One by one, he ridiculed the members of the Camarilla for effeminate behaviour, pacifism and even practicing Spiritualism.

The court found in von Moltke's favour, but the damage was already done, as "Harden provided an interpretative framework for the entire European press" (Domeier 2014, 739). He blamed Eulenburg directly for German failure during the Morocco crisis of 1905–1906, when an attempt to outmanoeuvre the French through threat of war only succeeded in making Germany more internationally isolated. According to Harden, Eulenburg's personal friendship with French diplomat Raymond Lecomte, which enabled the latter to meet with the Kaiser privately on the Leibenburg estate, undermined the German position: "only the homosexual tandem Eulenburg-Lecomte could have provided this 'invaluable service' to French diplomacy" (Domeier 2014, 744). Harden claimed nothing less than an international conspiracy of cosmopolitan gay men seeking to control international relations.

This paranoid fear of an internationalist "enemy within" exerting secret control brings us back to Forster's engagement with the Book of Esther through the use of the name of Vashti, because both Esther and Kuno are keepers of secrets. In addition, they both belong to identity groups against whom "prejudices [were] widely championed throughout European culture and society in the nineteenth century" (Pordzik 2010, 59). Pordzik draws attention to the links between those "homeless" individuals threatened with expulsion from the underground Machine and homosexuality. This homelessness can also be read as an iteration of the literary trope of the Wandering Jew, which can be traced back at least as far as Medieval Christendom. One of the names frequently given to the "legendary and vastly popular figure" (Hasan-Rokem 2008, 5) of the Wandering Jew is a variation on "Ahasver", or "Ahasuerus" (see, for example, Percy Byron Shelley's *Queen Mab* (1813) part

VII, or Hans Christian Andersen's *Ahasverus* (1844)).<sup>6</sup> Condemned for his sin to wander the earth until Christ's second coming, the Wandering Jew is the figure of homelessness *par excellence*.

At the turn of the twentieth century, antisemitism became an important political issue: "The Machine Stops" was written not long after the final rehabilitation of Alfred Dreyfus (1859–1935) who was permitted to re-join the French Army in 1906 following a twelve-year long antisemitic miscarriage of justice as a result of forgeries made by officers in an Army counterespionage unit.<sup>7</sup> It was a scandal whose impact would continue to be felt for many years throughout French society. Indeed, as Hannah Arendt states in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, "not the Dreyfus case with its trials but the Dreyfus Affair in its entirety offers a foregleam of the twentieth century" (1966, 93). For Domeier, there is a clear equivalence to be drawn here with the Eulenburg Scandal, which "became Germany's counterpart to the Dreyfus Affair in France – two examples of political, social, and cultural conflict that threatened the foundations of their respective countries" (2014, 737). Forster's character Kuno is thus a figure that draws together two perceived cosmopolitan threats to the nationalist, imperialist order of pre-Great War Europe.

The Dreyfus Affair, in Arendt's words, "gave birth to the Zionist movement" (1966, 120). Among those to take up the cause of Zionism as a result of the Dreyfus Affair was physician Max Nordau, who had achieved notoriety for his tract *Degeneration* (1892), described by Steven Aschheim (1993, 643) as "a veritable diatribe of cultural criticism that characterized virtually every modernist fin-de-siècle current as a symptom of exhaustion and inability to adjust to the realities of the modern industrial age". As a liberal positivist Nordau railed against the "irrationality" of Nietzsche, the moral decadence of Wilde's essays, and other developments in art and culture which queried "the classical humanizing axioms of Western morality, rationalist Enlightenment and liberal notions of progress" (Aschheim 1993, 652). He offered a masculinist vision of strong individual men leading social evolution in a new direction, and believed that "the new race of humans who would evolve by means of the trial of degeneration would serve a very specific political purpose" (Decker 2008, 56).

At the end of "The Machine Stops" Forster utilizes the "nineteenth-century medical discourse of exhausted nerves" (Decker 2008, 61) in order to bring attention to degeneracy fears, calling the Machine society a "sin against the body... centuries of wrong against the muscles and the nerves, and those five portals by which we can alone apprehend" (Forster 1954, 145). For Mark Decker, this passage is effectively applying the message of Nordau's less widely known later Zionist works to post-Boer War Britain, "urging the creation of a British people strong enough to master modernity. This exhortation can be seen both in the figure of Kuno and in the feral humans he encounters when he visits Earth's surface" (2008, 61). However, given Forster's critical stance toward British imperialism, the influence on his work of Edward Carpenter described above and the clearly satiric use of the

nineteenth-century romantic reunion of mother and errant son in this passage, it is by no means certain that Forster is in fact issuing such a call. Kuno's portrayal as proudly queer *and* Jewish functions to critique Nordau as both positivist and Zionist, a political position which pre-1948 was predicated on the idea of a "homeless nation". Kuno is seeking a homeland based not on political struggle in the sphere of international relations but rather on an atavistic medieval myth in which through a deathbed embrace with his mother he can claim to have "recaptured life, as it was in Wessex, when Aelfrid overthrew the Danes" (Forster 1954, 146).

### **"Degeneracy" and strength**

Kuno occupies the subject position of the moral degenerate and yet he remains strong, active and highly masculinised. The stereotypes of the effeminate homosexual and the weak intellectual Jew are turned on their heads by this figure of resistance who, precisely through his degeneracy, his "queerness" in the widest sense, is – to return to Muñoz – able to see an alternative futurity to the present. Nevertheless, the text remains tethered to its pre-Great War period, because as I have previously argued, "For Kuno, dying in the death of the Machine is an active means of participating in a greater cultural death through which the 'nobility' of humankind may be recovered and life itself reinvigorated" (Stock 2016, 440). In other words, the human products of social evolution who in the corridor outside Vashti's cell are "dying by hundreds out in the dark" (Forster 1954, 145) remain curiously abstract, and the dead bodies over which Vashti crawls toward Kuno are not described. On the final page of the story there is no sense of futility attached to these deaths because "Humanity has learnt its lesson" and the humans in the "honeycomb" structure of the broken city are only symbolic, given historical significance by being a part of this great dramatic ending (146). Forster's story here echoes nineteenth-century war literature in which, Daniel Pick argues, war became "an end in itself" as it "is capable of defining precisely what it is to be human, because it involves giving up the supreme 'self-interest', life itself" (1993, 15). The mechanisation of the Great War increased cultural anxieties surrounding mechanical mass production that are already present here. But the mixture of homoerotic and Oedipal imagery in these final passages, as well as the valorisation of the collapse of a civilisation, belongs to an age before the mechanised slaughter of the First World War.

In his condemnation of Kuno von Moltke and the Eulenburg Camarilla as excessively pacifist, Harden joked that "they don't dream of a world in flames since they're warm enough already (the term *warm* was a slang expression for homosexual)" (Domeier 2014, 739). In the ending of "The Machine Stops", Forster's valorisation of individual deaths amid flames and explosions, which ascribe to them a greater cultural death, exposes this as mere rhetorical fallacy in an era of intensive international debate over models of masculinity. This chapter has worked to expose elements of the close relationship between

politics, political thought and cultural forms. In doing so I have shown how the formal structures and narrative strategies of dystopian fiction are especially effective in helping us to understand values and assumptions upon which political action was based in the first decade of the twentieth century. This thread is further developed in the next chapter, where discussion turns to the relationship between the political and the aesthetic in post-Revolutionary Russia, focusing on Yevgeny Zamyatin's novel *We*.

## Notes

- 1 For example, noting the beehive imagery, Adams and Ramsden (2011, 722–23) argue that “the infrastructure of the Machine is so inseparable from its social structure that the failure of one causes the failure of the other”. See also March-Russell (2005, 65–66) and Pordzik (2010, 56). It is notable that before the nineteenth century the term “machine” could refer to something organic such as a hive (Stock 2009, 9). The most sustained expression of an analogy between the polis and beehives is perhaps Bernard Mandeville’s 1705 poem “The Grumbling Hives or Knaves Turn’d Honest” (sometimes known as *The Fable of the Bees*).
- 2 The visual appearance of Vashti is perhaps closer to the Selenites of Wells’s *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) than his childlike Eloi.
- 3 Arnold White found that in Manchester, during the first ten months of hostilities (1901), among 11,000 volunteers, 8,000 were “physically unfit” for service and a further 1,800 had insufficient chest size or “muscular power” to serve (quoted in Chinn 1995, 114).
- 4 Rowbotham (2009, 276) notes that E. M. Forster recorded Carpenter’s name in a list of authors in his diary in 1907.
- 5 In the denouement of the Hebrew *Megillah*, having secured the King’s promise that he will give her anything “up to half the Kingdom” (7:2) Esther asks for her people to be spared the fate his antisemitic advisor Haman has planned. Jews celebrate the subsequent reversal of fortune with the festival of Purim, traditionally cheering every mention of Mordecai and Esther in the story, while both Haman and Vashti are booed.
- 6 For a discussion of how the figure came to be given the non-Jewish name of Ahasuerus, otherwise associated by Jews with foolishness, see (Hasan-Rokem 2010).
- 7 Hannah Arendt states that the Court of Appeal which finally acquitted Dreyfus “had no authority to acquit” and therefore he “was never acquitted in accordance with the law, and the Dreyfus case was never really settled” (1966, 90).

## 2 “Libraries full of Kants”

### Heretics, history and Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We*

#### Introduction

In the last chapter I showed how E. M. Forster used dystopian narrative strategies in order to construct a critique of the hyper-masculine othering of queer and Jewish figures at both a political and cultural level with reference to specific historical events. I now turn to Yevgeny Zamyatin’s experimental approach to dystopian fiction to illustrate further issues at the intersection of politics and culture, which again mediate important moments in international history. To do so requires some understanding of how Zamyatin developed his political and aesthetic thought, and the specific events to which he responded.

Central to Zamyatin’s work is the figure of the heretic, a creative and political force for transformative change. It was a role in which he often cast himself as a well-connected and outspoken critic of both Leninism and Anglo-American capitalism in early revolutionary Russia. His novel *We*, completed in 1920 but only ever published outside Russia and in translation in his lifetime, is set in the distant future, centuries after a catastrophic 200-years war.<sup>1</sup> *We* is the diary of D-503, citizen of the authoritarian, rationally administered One State. He is chief builder of the “*Integral*” – a spaceship made from the toughened glass that is the principal building material of the entire polis. The city is “girdled” by a “Green Wall” of this glass, separating it from the wild steppe beyond. The diary records the fracturing of D-503’s supposedly “mathematical” collectivist social values and the development of an individual self, a disease doctors call “growing a soul”, as he falls in love with the rebel I-330 who secretly leads a tribe called the “Mephi” living beyond the Green Wall. After some revolutionary successes, I-330’s plot to commandeer the *Integral* to overthrow the state is uncovered. As the One State moves to quash the revolution, D-503 has a surgical operation to remove his imagination and gives up I-330, who is put to death.

Zamyatin’s *We* responds to political developments in Russia, the US, Britain, and central Europe. Its publication history likewise reflects the political turmoil of its day, and it is therefore an excellent hermeneutic tool for study of historical political conditions. This chapter begins by reflecting on Zamyatin’s life and the history of *We* as a literary artefact in cultural and

political history. The stormy interaction of political forces and the production of popular culture that is characteristic of post-revolutionary Russia in general and the novel's publication history in particular is mirrored within the text itself, in which Zamyatin addresses the role of technology in popular culture and mass production through formal experimentation and stylistic invention. Indeed as I show below, Zamyatin's political ideas shade into a closely worked out aesthetic framework for writing which he followed in the creation of *We*. There are important conceptual limitations in Zamyatin's central literary and political figure of the heretic, outlined here with reference to cinematic depictions of labour in *We*. Notwithstanding this, the experimental diary structure of the novel enables Zamyatin to forge remarkable connections between post-Einstein physics (especially a relativized view of time) and the individual imagination as a political project. In other words, arrangements of time and space within the narrative inform a political argument. Returning to a more formalist literary concern with metafiction, I then show how the faculty of imagination is the locus for an engagement with Kant's aesthetics in the novel. This approach is distinctive from other critics who have emphasised the Hegelian nature of Zamyatin's conception of dialectics (e.g. Beehler 1986). Zamyatin demonstrates the relevance of such ideas to the concrete reality of post-Revolutionary Russia, as can be seen in the novel's treatment of sexuality and the satirical adoption of workplace "scientific management techniques" into every aspect of life. The result is a radical novel full of tensions and antithetical claims, a synthesis of utopian thought and satirical critique.

### **Zamyatin's life and politics**

Yevgeny Zamyatin was born in 1884 in Lebedyan, 250 miles south of Moscow, to a well-educated religious family. He excelled at school and in 1902 joined the elite shipbuilding faculty in St Petersburg's new Polytechnic Institute (Curtis 2013, 10). During this time he travelled extensively and was in Odessa when mutiny on the *Potemkin* broke out. Back in St Petersburg, he became embroiled in the 1905 Revolution. "In those years," he later wrote, "being a Bolshevik meant following the line of greatest resistance, and I was a Bolshevik at that time" (Zamyatin 1970, 10). He was arrested and imprisoned until spring 1906, then exiled to his hometown. Due to administrative error, he was able to remain in St Petersburg illegally until 1911, where he taught at the Polytechnic and began publishing fiction. He was permitted legal re-entry to St Petersburg in 1913 following an amnesty.

In 1916 Zamyatin travelled to Britain to oversee construction of icebreakers as part of Russia's attempt to open up a northern route circumventing Germany's naval blockade. He settled in Jesmond, a middle-class suburb of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, and designed and supervised the building of icebreakers at Swan Hunters Shipyard, Wallsend. He also oversaw construction in Glasgow, Sunderland and South Shields and wrote the satirical novella

*Islanders*; all experiences which influenced aspects of the novel *We* (see Myers 1990, 1993; Edwards 1982). He returned to Russia during the October Revolution but within weeks his excitement turned to outrage and he “started publishing blatant personal attacks on Lenin” using thinly veiled allegory (Curtis 2013, 88).

Zamyatin met the (unofficial) Bolshevik Minister of Culture Maxim Gorky in 1917, and for several years thereafter he played leading roles in projects under the latter's directorship. As an editor, translator and writer Zamyatin was prominent in the Petrograd literary scene. He taught writers at the new Petrograd House of Arts for cultural education, and shipbuilding at the Polytechnic. In 1919 he had his first of several scrapes with Cheka, the new Soviet State security service. As a branch founder member of the All-Russian Writers' Union from 1920 he campaigned for “freedom of speech... legal rights and material welfare of its members” (Curtis 2013, 104). In 1922, after publishing several politically heterodox essays, he was arrested and threatened with temporary exile. He was delighted by this and readily agreed. Unaware of his wishes, several influential writers interceded on his behalf to have the sentence commuted (123–25). It was not the last time Zamyatin's dealings with Soviet authorities descended into farce.

Zamyatin gave several readings of *We* in Russia before it was formally banned in April 1924, but he was not hindered from publishing the novel abroad in translation. In addition to Gregory Zilboorg's 1924 English translation published in New York, the novel appeared in Czech (thanks to Roman Jakobson), German, and French (as *Nous Autres*). Reactions within the USSR to the novel were mixed: Iakov Braun's mostly sympathetic account, for example, argued that Zamyatin's “scientific outlook placed some limits on his artistic achievement” (Curtis 2013, 140), while Alexander Voronsky praised Zamyatin as a “master of the word. His language is fresh, original and exact”, but nevertheless denounced *We* as narrowly individualistic, a “lampoon” on existing socialism: “[t]o oppose *grass*, human *wilfulness*, and people covered with hair to communism means not to understand the essence of the question”, he argued, while grudgingly admitting “the artistic aspects of the novel are excellent” (1988, 25, 45, 46). For Zamyatin's contemporaries, the novel was a political minefield: in addition to the “Socratically bald” tyrannical Benefactor who uncannily resembles Lenin, it was obvious that the novel borrowed the title of the regime's favoured Proletkul't [Proletarian Culture] Movement's poet Vladimir Kirillov's poem *We*, which had “promised to burn Raphael's paintings and demolish museums in the name of a future in which exclusively proletarian artists would glorify the achievements of factory workers” (Curtis 2013, 91–92).

In the words of his biographer Julie Curtis, “the second half of the 1920s saw Zamyatin fighting an increasingly hopeless battle against the Soviet authorities in his attempts to get published or staged in his own country” (2013, 154). They perhaps understood that “in the cultural imaginary... significant political battles are fought” with material political results (Grayson,



Davies and Philpot 2009, 157), and for Zamyatin the 1927 publication of sections of *We* in Russian in Czechoslovakia had profound repercussions. In 1929 he was viciously denounced by Proletkul't, and resigned from Petrograd All-Russian Writers' Union in protest at their handling of the episode. He wrote to Rykov to request permission to travel; despite Gorky showing a copy of the letter to Stalin he was turned down. Finally, Gorky again interceded, personally delivering a letter from Zamyatin directly to Stalin in 1931. Improbably, the gamble worked: he was granted a one-year passport (Curtis 2013, 218–20). He never returned to Russia, dying in Paris in 1937.

### **Zamyatin in literary history**

Curtis's biography demonstrates that through short stories, plays, lectures and editing as well as his campaigning work, Zamyatin became an important and influential player in the Soviet 1920s literary scene. This provides a necessary corrective to Cold War era American scholarship, which tended to overplay his hostility to Bolshevism through an exclusive focus on *We* – a novel few of his Russian contemporaries ever read. In exile, Zamyatin kept his distance from White émigrés, but while he was politically opposed to Stalinism, Curtis suggests Zamyatin never fully gave up the idea to return to Russia. Moreover, he was accepted into Russia's new Writers Union in 1934 as a result of a handwritten note from Stalin himself (Curtis 2013, 276–77). It is important to read Zamyatin's work – especially *We* – in this context because in it he addresses the relationship of local political concerns to developments in world politics, and he saw aesthetics as crucially important to this task.

Zamyatin's novel *We* belongs to a period in which he termed his aesthetic approach “neorealist”. He defined neorealism specifically in relation to Russian literature, as a synthesis of late nineteenth-century realism and early twentieth-century symbolism. Realists like Gorky and Chekhov, he wrote, “depicted the apparent reality, visible to the naked eye”, reflecting, “in a tiny splinter of a mirror – a book or a story – the truest and most vivid piece of the earth... In Chekhov's work the art of portraying life, of portraying the earth, attained its highest point” (Zamyatin 1970, 36, 42, 36). With nowhere further to take realism, younger writers reacted by creating symbolism (37).

Zamyatin's neat conceptualisation skirts over a more complex historical and literary context,<sup>2</sup> but by painting symbolism as a Russian movement Zamyatin could argue that it represented realism's antithesis. Characteristically, the naval architect compared the shift in literary ideas between the two movements to the technological leap from trains to aeroplanes: symbolism, he averred, was as clumsy and experimental as were early flying machines, yet it provided a necessary reaction against the constraints and overdevelopment of realism and thereby a new perspective on the world. For Zamyatin, the faster “tempos of modern life do not tolerate the ‘slow, horse-and-buggy descriptions’ of nineteenth-century realism. The age demands that

syntax become 'elliptical, volatile,' and the image must also convey 'quickness of motion'" (quoted in Ehre 1988, 133).

Russian symbolism also produced grim, universally symbolised pictures of life reflecting an industrial, mass age, which moved beyond the realists' obsession with perfect mimesis. Zamyatin characterised this approach as like an x-ray image of a skeleton; the anatomical and technologically sophisticated photograph which was a symbol of both life and death. The Russian symbolists' most valuable contribution, to Zamyatin's mind, was their concentration on form and on the sounds of words. To fit the complex emotional states about which they were writing, the symbolists successfully "created a science of verbal music" (Zamyatin 1970, 39).

In Zamyatin's schema, the sublation of this expressly dialectical struggle between Realism and Symbolism was what he termed "neorealism", or "synthesism". "The material of the neorealists", he explained, "is the same as that of the realists: life, earth, rock, everything that has weight and dimensions. But, while they use this material, the neorealists do primarily what the symbolists sought to do; they create generalizations and symbols" (Zamyatin 1970, 44).

Neorealism employed images as if using a microscope, which were more "real" precisely because thus magnified they appeared estranged and alien. It was characterised by irony, a satirically Swiftian smile at the world and the "use of the method of Impressionism; clarity and sharp, often exaggerated, vividness of colors; use of the village, the backwoods, as the scene of action". This put neorealism at odds with symbolism's concentration on the bustling novelty of industrial cities, but both aesthetic approaches nevertheless used "broad, abstract generalizations – achieved by depiction of everyday trifles; terseness of language; 'showing' rather than 'telling about'; use of folk and local speech; use of verbal music" (Zamyatin 1970, 48). The diary form of *We* is exceptionally well suited to the depiction of "everyday trifles" and D-503 obsessively records trivial information as part of a tightly controlled, extended schema of imagery. For example, when D-503 notices an inkblot next to his name on the record of his building's controller, it recalls his earlier memory of crying as a child because he got an inkblot on his "unif". In addition to being a symbol of irrationality and carelessness, it reflects D-'s childishness and the controller's relation to him as a surrogate mother. The use of invented colloquialisms such as "unif" meanwhile is an example of "local speech", albeit localised in time rather than space. For Parrinder (1973, 20), "the future consciousness, and even the future language" of *We* are its "most radical conceptions" and "it is Zamyatin's imagination of these conditions – his revelation of the future through its writings – that establishes *We* as a uniquely modernist work of science fiction". As Gary Kern argues, Zamyatin achieves this "futurity" of language through a number of intelligently crafted techniques. His idiosyncratic syntax eliminates many grammatical parts of written language, and eschews lengthy sentences containing multiple subordinate clauses. Kern (1988, 120) claims that Zamyatin,

Sought to reproduce what he called 'thought language' (*myslennyi iazyk*) – the speed language of 'pieces, fragments and additions.' The reader is thus given only the guidelines to the action: faced with incomplete sentences (aposiopesis), changes of construction (anacoluthon) and bare allusions, he is forced to fill the missing links, to think, and, in a sense, to create with the author.

The combination of the future setting and prose laden with aposiopesis and anacoluthon ("But now... Yes, precisely: I feel some alien speck in my brain, like the finest eyelash in the eye" (Zamyatin 1999, 32–33, ellipsis in original))<sup>3</sup> contributes to an effect that Victor Shklovsky termed "defamiliarization" (*Ostranenie*). Shklovsky's premise was that "art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*" (1965, 12). Through a variety of techniques including, but not limited to, "wordplay, deliberately roughened rhythm, or figures of speech" (Lemon & Reis in Shklovsky 1965, 5), the writer arrests the "automatism" of perception and forces the reader to be aware of each individual word. Zamyatin's novel forces the reader to actively fill in gaps, and demands reflective reading (see Stock 2016, 416–17).<sup>4</sup> I argue that this is a rhetorical as well as a narrative strategy, which aims to get the reader to make an imaginative investment in the warning implicit in the novel's futurity.

In aesthetic terms the rapid pace, use of irregular pauses and ellipses, and confusion of bright clashing colours offers "a similar solidity that Picasso and Braque, looking back to Cézanne, were working for in the cubist experiments" (Ehre 1988, 133). But while the cubists were, in expressionist Ludwig Meidner's (2003, 170) words, "contemporaries of the engineer", Zamyatin was a writer *and* an engineer. In this context, D-503's aesthetic appreciation of the *Integral* ("a graceful, elongated ellipsoid made of our glass – as eternal as gold, as flexible as steel" (82)) seems to mirror the author's own unabashed admiration for technological forms.

### Cinema: reading the body

Zamyatin brings together his elevation of technology and use of stylistic devices that recall post-impressionism in the novel's treatment of cinema. Here the chronotopic organisation of time and space within the narrative, outlined in the introduction above, is especially significant with regards to movement. On the "Day of Unanimity" when the supposedly "democratic" election of the Benefactor by a unanimous public vote is disrupted by thousands of the Mephi voting against him, the ensuing scene of mass panic is identified with cinema through the image of "thousands of silently screaming mouths, as on some monstrous movie screen" (144). To underline the point, the word "screen" is repeated in each of the following two paragraphs (R. Russell 2000, 95). For Zamyatin, film is an excellent means for making movement on such a grand scale comprehensible because he held that in

cinema “the most important thing is motion, motion at any cost” (Zamyatin 1970, 291).

The engagement with cinema reaches beyond identification of film with the intensity of emotions of crowds. The novel's visual focus constantly flickers between panoramas of the cityscape and “close-up” images of isolated body parts. Here, the elimination of grammatical parts of speech is replaced in part by the grammar of cinema (Kern 1988, 125).<sup>5</sup> In the Second Entry of his diary D-503 records meeting O-90 for a walk: “[S]he looks exactly like her name[...] carved in the round, all of her, with that pink O, her mouth, open to meet every word I say. And also, that round, plump fold in her wrist, like a baby's” (4). The tight focus on mouth and wrist act as a synecdoche for her character and physical appearance, while the link Zamyatin establishes between the shape of O-90's body and her name creates a memorable visual impression that he can rely on readers to recall every time her name subsequently appears.<sup>6</sup> There is a cinematic quality to this “heightened readability of the body” (Armstrong 1998, 227). Yet precisely because it is “readable”, O's body is open to misinterpretation. Thus when O- fails to conform to the identity D- “reads” in her body (softly rounded, innocent, honest, unblemished) in her negative reaction to his decision (never acted upon) to inform the “Guardians” (i.e. the secret police) about I-330's illegal activities, he becomes angry. When D- is unable to parse the “X” formed by I-330's brow, he is likewise frustrated. D- perceives individual women's bodies especially through a masculinised cinematic gaze, but precisely because of his gendered expectations and desires his “readings” of them are weak and inaccurate.

Descending into the street, D-503's cinematic gaze moves across the scene: “[t]he avenue was full[...] The numbers marched in even ranks, four abreast, ecstatically stepping in time to the music” (5). The description separates D-503 from the marching ranks like a wide-angled panning shot. It is entirely fitting with D-'s ideal of the citizens of the One State as being efficient as machines that he views them as if through a lens, and Robert Russell (2000, 77) notes that D- views “the beautiful patterns of synchronized movement” in the construction site of the *Integral* through a similarly cinematic prism. As Walter Benjamin (1999, 243 n. 21) put it, “mass reproduction is aided especially by the reproduction of masses”. By identifying himself with a camera viewpoint, narrator D-503 stresses both his “mechanical” nature and his self-belief as an objective, rational recorder of daily life, simultaneously representing the crowd as an expression of the ideology of the One State in action.

D-503's camera-like vision seems to anticipate Dzigo Vertov's 1922 “WE: Variant of a Manifesto”, in which he exclaimed, “saws dancing at a sawmill convey to us a joy more intimate and intelligible than that on human dance floors”. “*The new man*” whom Vertov (1984, 7–8) wanted as his future “gratifying” subject, would be “free from unwieldiness and clumsiness, will have the light, precise movements of machines”. Such are the many men “turning like the levers of a single huge machine” in the construction of the *Integral*, and it is hard to imagine a more perfectly prophetic satire of Vertov's

adulation of mechanism (82). Zamyatin could achieve this because he understood the allure of mechanical movement and human synchronicity. Both men were obsessed with movement, and Vertov's seminal *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), is built around shots edited together at an incessantly lively pace. However, the theoretical underpinning of their work differed substantially. Vertov ultimately aimed to reflect the Bolshevik conception of the "reality" of the new "Soviet paradise". His montage techniques, which required "the geometrical extract of movement through an exciting succession of images", were intended only to valorise "electric man" (Vertov 1984, 8). In other words, he followed the orthodox Bolshevik aesthetic of rationalised, mechanised labour as demanded by Proletkul't a decade earlier.

### Labour and heretics

In the literary world Aleksei Gastev exemplified this aesthetic. A labour organiser, metalworker and the author of *Shockwork Poetry*, Gastev believed that "work in all its manifestations was sacred" and that "taking labor as a raw material... the new specialist will transform it into a thing of harmony and beauty" (Carden 1987, 6). For Gastev the improvement of labour conditions and the efficiencies that American entrepreneurs such as Henry Ford and Frederick Winslow Taylor had instituted could lead to work being more productive, less frustrating and eventually even personally fulfilling. In the words of Patricia Carden (1987, 10), technology thereby becomes "the means to an honorable life in which not just a few in the privileged occupations, but every member of society will be joined in productive and fulfilling labor". For Zamyatin, however, humankind was incapable of submitting to such rationalized impersonal systems. Hence, Carden argues that "it is as though Zamyatin issues a challenge to the Gastevs of his generation: Your love of beauty, your capacity for philosophy, can only lead you ultimately to the irrational, the non-machine, if you are not to betray it" (1987, 12).

As a writer who also taught shipbuilding, Zamyatin had already made this paradoxical journey to a form of romantic rejection of mechanical rationality. His opposition to Gastev and the Proletkul't writers was founded on the belief that literature had an obligation to stand over and against the increasingly mechanical (re)production of modernity. In Zamyatin's philosophy, the universe is polarised between two forces: entropy and revolution. "entropy tends towards a state of rest or death, revolution towards a state of movement and life" (Richards 1962, 16). For Zamyatin, neither the historical Bolshevik Revolution, nor the orthodoxies of artistic agencies like Proletkul't could endure *forever*: to stake a claim to the final revolution is to make the non-sensical claim that "this is the highest number". As I-330 says to D-503 in *We*, "there is no final [revolution]. Revolutions are infinite. The final one is for children: children are frightened by infinity, and it's important that children sleep peacefully at night..." (174). Although Zamyatin himself would not put it in such terms (for reasons I explore below) I want to suggest that

this is a properly *utopian* position in that it resists historical closure. For Zamyatin, Bolshevism became *anti-utopian* in attempting to stem the flow of the very dialectical historical process that brought the Party to power. Zamyatin effectively argues Leninism represents a childish desire for stasis rather than mature social dreaming. The vocation and indeed *responsibility* of the artist is to act as a heretic, resisting stasis and repetition.

The world is kept alive only by heretics: the heretic Christ, the heretic Copernicus, the heretic Tolstoy. Our symbol of faith is heresy: tomorrow is inevitably heresy to today, which has turned into a pillar of salt, and to yesterday, which has scattered to dust.

(Zamyatin 1970, 51)

Zamyatin conceives of heretics as compelling, dissatisfied outsiders who create tension, provoke responses, and, like Christ at the moment of crucifixion, sacrifice themselves to the tomorrow that they bring into existence (Zamyatin 1970, 22 and 21–33 *passim*).<sup>7</sup> This valorisation of individual charismatic heretics, rhetorically reified until they appear to possess quasi-fantastical abilities and visions, leads him into tricky balancing acts with his insistence on dialectical historical and artistic development (see Barratt 1984; Rooney 1986; and Voronsky 1988, 45). In a typical iteration Zamyatin writes:

These are the three schools in art, and there are no others. Affirmation, negation, and synthesis – the negation of the negation. The syllogism is closed, the circle completed. Over it arises a new circle – new and yet the same. And out of these circles the spiral of art, holding up the sky.

(1970, 81)

The dialectic is here presented as the force behind creativity, and through the addition of the image of a “spiral of art, holding up the sky” we can see it as an aesthetic sensibility above all else. What begins as negative and closed (“there are no others”) becomes a moment of vital importance, powerfully free and universal. It is a closed structure which rather than being oppressive allows for almost unlimited movement under “the sky”. Zamyatin’s understanding of dialectics is properly idealist in that it begins with the conceptual apparatus of dialectics and proceeds to apply it to concrete situations. Opposing Marx, this is a heaven-down approach, not earth-upwards.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, while Marx looked forwards to communism as the End of History *qua* class struggle, Zamyatin denied the possibility of an end to struggle as such. To him there could be no Hegelian Absolute Ideal – revolution is *unending*.

Victoria Rooney suggests one reason for the tension between Zamyatin’s figure of the heretic and his dialectical framework is his fashionable flirtation with the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>9</sup> Rooney reads Zamyatin’s heretic as a politicized form of the Nietzschean *Übermensch* (1986, 675). She sees Zamyatin’s separation of the creative individual from the “masses” as elitist and

dogmatic, resting upon a superficial interpretation of Nietzsche that attempts to tie the concept of "eternal recurrence" to his own more Hegelian framework. There is indeed something uncanny about the faceless, perfectly synchronised and endlessly repeated crowds in *We*. Their docile happiness is comparable to that of Nietzsche's "Ultimate Men" (see Nietzsche 1969, 46–47), while almost all the main characters are members of a cultured and educated elite: D-503 is the chief builder/mathematician, S-4711 is a "Guardian", I-330 is a classical pianist (among other things), R-13 is a state poet and even U is a school teacher. Significantly, only O-90's job is never mentioned. She goes to live with the Mephi, who are only ever seen in crowds, whether protesting at the Day of Unanimity or celebrating the breach of the Green Wall. In this context, as Barratt (1984, 353) points out, Zamyatin's conception of heresy "rests on a profoundly undemocratic conception of mankind (a point which is inevitably overlooked by those who stress his humanism). The heretic's function is to inject into the historical process the iconoclastic element without which the dialectic of progress would fail to operate."

Zamyatin's conception of heresy seems at first inconsistent with his belief that the pattern of the Hegelian dialectic is the driving force of history, unless the heretic is viewed as both an *Übermensch* (a figure who, "embracing the moral as well as the immoral side... is valuable in himself, in the richness of his individuality" (Rooney 1986, 681)), as well as a politician performing the socially useful function of historical actor (which Nietzsche's *Übermensch* does not). However, Zamyatin importantly insisted that heretics concentrate on the far future; not concerning themselves with narrow political policies, and instead imagining a different historical epoch altogether. In other words, the heretic cannot be a political strategist. For this reason, I-330's revolution is destined to fail. She is not an artist, merely an agitator. On the other hand, D-503 is genuinely creative as a diarist, a builder and, through the act of propagation (and against state rules), as father of a child with O-90. This enables the novel to remain critically open and even hopeful at its end. Their child will grow up with the Mephi beyond the Green Wall, the progeny of irrational and rational forces in creative tension. I-330 is an agent of political change and muse to D-503. But as both builder and writer he is an artist. I-330 keeps the future open by creating chaos; D-503 does so by creating form.

## Metafiction

For D-503, the very act of writing is one of creative tension. Early on, the diary is compared to the feelings of a pregnant woman on first becoming aware of the "pulse of a new, still tiny, still blind little human being" within herself (2). This is followed by a description of the alienation of artistic production, the mental separation of undertaking artistic labour from the fruition of the final work as something detached from oneself. The diary, he writes, "is I, and at the same time, not I. And for many long months it will be necessary to nourish it with my own life, my own blood, then tear it painfully

from myself and lay it at the feet of the One State" (2). Like the remarkable publication history of the text of *We* itself once it left its author's hands, D-503's writings have unintended consequences within the story world of the novel: O-90 cries when D-503 reads them to her, while U discovers the Mephi plan to commandeer the *Integral* spaceship in D-'s writings and informs the authorities. Within the text, the diary, this thing that "is I, and at the same time, not I", in its very conception stands as an individual unit against its own title of "*We*", and works against its fictional creator. Hence D-503 characteristically sets out to be a "mathematical" recording instrument of daily life but becomes a novelist, an adventure-story writer.

D-503's penchant for addressing his imaginary audience directly ("you, the unknown readers to whom the *Integral* will bring my notes" (10)) has a defamiliarizing effect, reminding the reader that not only the content of the novel but its premise too is fantastic. This prevents what, as alluded to above, Shklovsky (1965, 12–13) termed the "automatism of perception", and in so doing draws attention to the *artfulness* of the diary. D-503 transcribes his story as adventure, but he is also adventurous in his explorations and experiments with the process of writing. In comparison to a text like *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells, for example, his method is highly inventive: Wells' Time Traveller returns to the present in order to relate events yet to take place in the far distant future. D-503 inverts this pattern as a writer from the (imagined) future whose expressed intention is to write *as if* his readers are from the past (our present), albeit only because he perceives them as less "advanced". Thus he states, "I am confident you will understand that it is far more difficult for me to write than it has been for any other author in the history of mankind. Some wrote for their contemporaries; others for their descendants. But no one has ever written for ancestors, or for beings similar to his primitive, remote ancestors" (23).<sup>10</sup>

The net result is that while D-503 conceives of history as a linear path of development, he implicitly recognises that time is experienced as relative to one's location in the universe. Nevertheless, in his diary D- constantly strives to achieve a camera-eye "objectivity" that somehow negates the subjectivity of space and time and his conceived readership. Structurally speaking, D-503's self-deception is unsurprising: D- is what narratologists call an "intradiegetic-homodiegetic" narrator (he lives within the "storyworld" and tells a story in which he is a central character (Herman 2009, 66–67)). Yet as the quotation above illustrates, he is (by analogy) attempting to write a text that stands outside of the normal human perception of linear time. Moving beyond Wells' description in *The Time Machine* of time as the "Fourth Dimension" (Wells 2005c, 4), Zamyatin here seems to be exploring the possible implications of Einstein's general theory of relativity for both writing fiction and political thinking.<sup>11</sup> D-503 writes anachronically "back in time", to historical beings that he, as a member of the flight crew of the *Integral*, believes he will meet in his own future. The Newtonian theories of space, which D-503 venerates as sacred, are in conflict with this mission. The



"mathematical certainty" on which he builds his worldview thus stands in stark contradiction to his own creative process.

By putting pen to paper D-503's notes become a means of both historical and personal change. Unlike the collaborative building project of the *Integral*, D-'s diary writing necessitates withdrawal from social life. In an age of mass socialisation, in which "individual consciousness is merely a sickness" (128), and where "the natural path from nonentity to greatness is to forget that you are a gram and feel yourself instead a millionth of a ton" (115), the diary form D-503 naively chooses to express himself is inherently rebellious.<sup>12</sup> such writing is an imagination act and therefore flatly contradicts the formulaic "happiness" of the One State. "Can it be true that I once felt – or imagined that I felt – all this?" D-503 rhetorically asks on the penultimate page, after having his imagination surgically removed. He gives this section the ironic heading "I Am Certain" (231–32), recalling D-503's earlier assertion that "knowledge, absolutely sure of its infallibility, is faith" (59). There is nothing "scientific" (in the Newtonian sense D- intends) about such faith, here linked to a pathological and affectless *lack* of imagination.

The One State aims to keep its citizens emotionally underdeveloped to preclude unpredictable passions like anger, jealousy and pain. In its totalising model of rationality, emotions are animal-like and unsanitary. D- is especially emotionally illiterate and suffers total incomprehension of other characters' psychic and emotional lives. Characters' motivations tend to slip between the text's frequent ellipses and dashes: it is impossible to know, for instance, whether I-330 really ever loves D-503 or, as hinted more than once, she merely uses him to gain access to the *Integral*.

Russell (2000, 107) argues that in a world of transparent glass, "The opaqueness of the body is used throughout *We* as a metaphor for the mysterious, unknowable quality within each person". There are two additional opaque objects in the One State worth noting: the Ancient House, whose shuttered windows are more than once compared to human eyes that are open or closed to the outside world, and the paper on which D-503 writes his diary. From a hermeneutic perspective this opacity is significant because, as with Forster's "The Machine Stops", the text of *We* both demands to be read and resists interpretation. The shared opacity of the diary-novel as work of art and the human body is comically brought together in the Twenty-Eighth Entry, when S-4711, the One State "Guardian" who has been spying on D-503, bursts into his room (naïvely, D- does not yet admit any suspicions that S- is a double agent for the Mephi). D- hides the diary on the chair on which he sits. On blank paper in front of him, in order not to look suspicious, he writes:

'The Benefactor is the most perfect disinfection, essential to mankind, and therefore in the organism of the One State no peristalsis...' With a jumping pen I squeezed out this utter nonsense, bending ever lower over the table, while in my head there was a crazy hammering, and with my

back I heard the door handle click [...] My whole being throbbled and pulsed in that (fortunately untransparent) part of my body which covered the manuscript.

(166–67)

As Russell points out, S notices immediately that this writing is “somewhat ambiguous”, as “the ‘detritus’ flushed out by the Benefactor is, in fact, D-’s entire subconscious, which gives rise to the diary” (2000, 100; 101). Indeed, D states that he originally intended his diary to be a *digest* of the One State, “to record what I see and think, or, to be more exact, what we think” (2). In other words, this “utter nonsense” is the sort of drivel D-503 originally intended to subject his readers to throughout the diary, a paean to a sterile and boringly “happy” existence. But from the moment on the first page D-503 compares himself as writer to a pregnant woman, it is clear that other psychological motivations are at work. The creative diary is new life, and D- protects it like a bird sitting on its nest because it is an “anguished – perhaps most precious – piece of myself.” It contains opaquely human expressions of emotions, desires and thoughts, becoming ever more complex and interesting to attempt to read because it is a creation linked to the imaginative faculty. There is, however, also a rather Rabelaisian ironic inversion in D- sitting on his diary, because as he does so the digestive image which he “squeeze[s] out” in order not to get in trouble with the State, is in its literal sense puerile and scatological.

### **Kant, Hegel and the faculties of the mind**

The imagination is a strong animating force in Zamyatin’s concept of heresy and political action, and the influence of Kant’s Third Critique can be seen in Zamyatin’s presentation of the imaginative faculty. Although referenced several times in *We*, Kant is not discussed in the main corpus of essays, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg, to which many critics have first turned in their discussions of the novel, and there has been little critical attention given to the place of Kant in Zamyatin’s philosophy. *We* has been widely praised for its formal elegance and beautiful prose and it is surely significant in this regard that for Kant an idea properly meant a rational concept, and “when a rational concept is given a concrete expression, it appears as an ideal of beauty” (Gjesdal 2009, 13). In other words, it is not concepts themselves that are beautiful, but their individual expressions in the phenomenal world. More precisely, “a judgment of the kind ‘x is beautiful’ is not a judgment regarding the properties of an object ‘x’ at all. It is a judgment about the feeling that the contemplation of this object induces in us.” Beauty is thus for Kant both a reflexive judgement and an ideal of the imagination (Gjesdal 2009, 24). In *We*, the imaginative use of formal techniques creates a powerful political narrative.

Although the influence of Kant is perceptible in Zamyatin’s writing, his character D-503’s own idea of the beautiful is not Kantian at all. This can be

seen in the Second Entry when D- anthropomorphises the machines “dancing” as they build the *Integral* (“I saw the whole beauty of this grandiose ballet”). His reaction to the experience is a subjective judgement capable of being universalised (in line with Kant’s conception of beauty), but the scene has a clearly recognisable external purpose (constructing the *Integral*), and, as the builder, D-’s view cannot be construed as disinterested. Furthermore, having aestheticized so elegantly this moment of industrial construction, his judgement (“why is this beautiful? Why is dance beautiful? Answer: because it is unfree motion” (4)) is reductive and utilitarian. D- attempts to capture the whole of the experience in a more Hegelian fashion, whereby the philosophical concept he generates is more important than the subjective experience itself, adding “the whole profound meaning of dance lies precisely in absolute, esthetic subordination, in ideal unfreedom”. The ambiguity by which D-503 undermines his own argument here does not commit Zamyatin to either position, however, and the passage continues in a similarly equivocal vein:

If it is true that our forebears abandoned themselves to dance at the most exalted moments of their lives (religious mysteries, military parades), it means only one thing: the instinct of unfreedom is organically inherent in man from time immemorial, and we, in our present life, are only consciously...

(4)

The discussion is left ambiguously open by the characteristic ellipsis at the end of the passage. While it could be that the combination of the terms “abandoned” and “exalted moments” with “religious mysteries, military parades” is intended to demonstrate the absurdity of D-503’s argument, he is also unintentionally linking the One State to the most “exalted moments” of non-rational societies of the past.

Another possibility is that this passage is making reference to the “Apollonian–Dionysiac duality”, which Nietzsche believed to underpin the “continuous evolution” of art (Nietzsche 1956, 19). The formal nature of the dances to which D-503 here refers with their “unfree” movement, most rigidly in military parades, would bring it under the banner of the Apollonian. However, the “exalted” nature of chorus dances, as “rites of redemption, of glorious transfiguration” also demonstrate the profound influence of the Dionysian (Nietzsche 1956, 26). D-’s suggestion that “the instinct of unfreedom is organically inherent in man from time immemorial” would therefore represent an ironic inversion of Nietzsche’s (1956, 28) description of the Apollonian Greek who, feeling himself for the first time under the influence of Dionysian symbolic forces, “realize[s], with a shudder ... that his Apollonian consciousness was but a thin veil hiding from him the whole Dionysiac realm”.

Zamyatin’s reliance on the Hegelian dialectic for his philosophy of artistic and historical development has tended to overshadow his engagement with

both Kant and Nietzsche. Yet these thinkers placed vital roles in his thought because Zamyatin could not accept Hegel's argument that art in modernity was a reflection of the Absolute and, as Gjesdal (2009, 11) puts it, was "surpassed by religion and, ultimately, philosophy". Zamyatin therefore used Kant to modify his Hegelianism, in a manner comparable to that of hermeneutic theorist Hans-Georg Gadamer who, Gjesdal continues, followed Kant's belief that "the experience of art can never be fully exhausted by conceptual (philosophical) means". In *We* it is through Kant that art is once more veiled and becomes like the eyes of I-330, which D-503 describes as "two eerily dark windows, and within, such a mysterious alien life" (27).

The celebratory poetic power of the text and its explosive, life-affirming imagery of colour and nature are object lessons in Kant's belief that although aesthetic judgements "do not themselves contribute a whit to the knowledge of things, they still belong to the faculty of knowledge" (Kant 2007, 4). The profusion of such opulent, impressionistic imagery in *We* demonstrates (rather than making a formal argument for) the power of aesthetic comprehension. For Kant, this power is the imagination, which "can be shown to contribute to the interpretation, as well as to the constitution, of experience" (Makkreel 1990, 1).

Notwithstanding the Kantian influence, however, the Hegelian content of *We* extends well beyond Zamyatin's dialectical framework. For example, when D-503 first meets I-330, she asks to see his hands, which, D- ashamedly describes as "hairy, shaggy hands... An ape's hands" (7). Hegel once paradoxically claimed that "precisely because he *knows* he is an animal, [man] ceases to be an animal" (quoted in Gearhart 1986, 1042). D- knows only too well that this axiom may apply more generally ("even in our time the wild, apelike echo still occasionally rises from somewhere below, from some shaggy depth" (14)). He is so frantic to escape his animal origins that over the course of the narrative he splits his identity in two in order to protect the "rational" side from contamination by this alien, animal other. Thus in the Tenth Entry, when D- is unable to repress his sexual desire (which is always allied in the narrative's schema with the animal) he writes:

I became glass. I saw – within myself.

There were two of me. The former one, D-503, number D-503, and the other...

(56)

Such transparent imagery stands in direct contrast to the opacity of the fully human I-330, as repeatedly highlighted through the image of her eyelids lowering like blinds.

To D-503, most assuredly, Hegel's thesis that "the real is the rational and the rational is the real" (Pinkard 1990, 837) is taken at face value: his "unknown planetary readers" are not to remain unknown; everything – universally – can and therefore *must* be integrated into the One State system by

the successful mission of the *Integral*. The One State argument in favour of the *Integral* contains a logical absurdity however, for how could exploration of the unknown be compatible with the desire of the One State to *end* the capacity for imagination? The stated aim to find inhabited planets and make the inhabitants "divinely rational" is a political justification, not an explanation. There is no practical utility to the mission at all unless it serves a political purpose within the One State. After all, if no one has been beyond the Green Wall since the "Two Hundred Years War", as the reader is informed in the analeptic passage that begins the Third Entry, there is undoubtedly a danger to the State in permitting a space vehicle full of citizens to see uncharted and unknown areas of the home planet, as well as the unpredictable dangers of meeting non-rational beings. There is no (Kantian) imperative or any perceptible privation driving space exploration. Having spent centuries consolidating the withdrawal of humanity from nature by gathering the populace within a hermetically sealed wall, the idea of pioneering a mission *over* the wall, climbing through the freedom of the sky to interact with a non-rational universe is contrary to the *raison d'être* of the One State. As D- argues, "the entire history of mankind, insofar as we know it, is the history of transition from nomadic to increasingly settled forms of existence. And does it not follow that the most settled form (ours) is at the same time the most perfect (ours)?" (11).

D-503's rhetorical question is in fact based on unsound reasoning: he neither proves that historical transition entails "progress" towards "perfection" nor that the most settled form *must* be the most perfect. As the reader soon discovers, D-'s society is not even particularly settled. But even if we do take D-503's argument at face value, it only begs the question as to why this "most settled" society is building spaceships to explore regions beyond all knowledge. The *Integral* overthrows the (outwardly) rigid political organisation of time and space in the One State by inviting imaginative speculation. Judged by its avowed purpose of exploration the *Integral* is in fact a sower of dissonance, a site of insurrection and a symbol of one of the central tensions of life in the One State.

The *Integral* is, then, an ironic figure. The irony extends, as Collins notes, even to its name because by balancing creative design and rational production the *Integral* "represents a balance of thrust and containment" like an *integrated* psyche (Collins 1973, 76). But while in a healthy psyche the rational and the irrational are balanced, the attack of the One State on its citizens' imaginations (which D-503 treats reductively as a synonym for the irrational) represents a gross inconsistency on the part of the One State and is itself therefore a non-rational action.

The "unknown beings on other planets, who may still be living in the primitive condition of freedom", addressed by D-503 as "you, pink-cheeked, full-bodied Venusians, and you, Uranians, sooty as blacksmiths" are hypothetical products of D-503's imagination. Indeed, unlike the narrators of space novels such as Wells's *The First Men in the Moon* (1901), D-503 as

narrator of *We* offers no empirical knowledge of the creatures that he imagines live on other planets: his intended readers are entirely “imaginative” only insofar as they are imaginary. It is both part of the satirical purpose of the novel that the One State promotes creative, imaginative work like D-503's diary (which despite its author's avowed intentions works to undermine the State), and an element that imbues the text with radically open hopefulness. The tension created by the One State's *irrational* pursuit of two contrary aims – an increase in individual creativity (albeit in the service of the State) and the exorcising of the imagination – creates the very cleft through which the Mephi can attack.

### The power of love

The diary also provides D-503 with an outlet to express his first experiences of violent sexual jealousy. In a move that links Kant's utilitarian view of marriage with a critique of “free love” as advocated by (the notoriously promiscuous) H. G. Wells in texts like *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and *In The Days of the Comet* (1906), the pink tickets give citizens of the One State the right to access each other as sexual products.<sup>13</sup> In Wells's *In the Days of the Comet*, “free love” is valorised by the sight of the “*splendid nearer prospect of that dreamland city*” which the replacement of the instinct towards sexual possession by reason and harmonious communal living effects (Wells 1985, 249 emphasis in original). In *We*, by contrast, the harmony provided by state-sanctioned promiscuity is superficial, and as Zamyatin's narrator puts it, “under this cool quiet glass something violent, blood-red, shaggy rushed soundlessly” (57).

In early Soviet society, political attitudes toward sexuality were varied. Sheila Fitzpatrick (1978, 255–56) makes clear that, “the authorities – most of the old Bolsheviks” saw “too much sexual activity” as “a distraction from the Revolution”. Nevertheless, in major cities, and especially within the universities of Petrograd and Moscow, sexual liberation – for which many read “free love” – was simply another side of political liberation: At the social level “soldiers demobilized from the Red Army brought back a casual macho attitude toward sex which younger brothers worked hard to imitate. Younger sisters absorbed Soviet teaching on the emancipation of women, including emancipation from the bonds of bourgeois marriage and the traditional passive role”. The new regime meanwhile “legalized divorce and abortion, secularized marriage, gave de facto marriage the same legal status as registered marriage, and tried to remove the social stigma from unmarried mothers and their children” (255).

For comic and satirical writers including Zamyatin, Pilnyak, Malyshkin and Kataev, these legal and social changes were an easy target (Sandomirsky 1951, 200). As Fitzpatrick makes clear, whatever the less riotous reality of student life, in literature they were often portrayed as startlingly promiscuous and decadent, and *We* anticipates the famous 1921 pronouncement of

Commissar for Social Welfare Aleksandra Kollontai that, “[t]he sexual act must be seen not as something shameful and sinful but as something which is as natural as the other needs of [a] healthy organism, such as hunger or thirst” (quoted in Carleton 1997, 233). Fitzpatrick’s claim (1978, 256–57, 263) that abortion rates were high in early Soviet society is unsurprising. Contraception is not mentioned in *We* and a contemporary Russian reader could well be imagined to read between the lines when promiscuity is normalised, familial relations are abolished and the State places tight restrictions on who may beget children.

In *We* the State control of breeding has a clear eugenic purpose, and this points to Zamyatin’s engagement with contemporary debates about the viability of eugenic control of the population. D-503 draws attention to the eugenic basis of One State society in his comment that the ancients knew “agriculture, poultry-breeding, fish-breeding [...] yet fail[ed] to go on to the ultimate step of this logical ladder – child-breeding; fail[ed] to establish such a thing as our Maternal and Paternal norms” (13–14). Scientific interest in eugenics increased markedly from the turn of the century until World War II. It counted support from a range of political backgrounds, from conservatives who worried about national degeneration (as outlined in chapter one), to non-orthodox socialists like H. G. Wells. In *A Modern Utopia* (1905) Wells had argued against eugenics, noting “State breeding of the population was a reasonable proposal for Plato to make, in view of the biological knowledge of his time and the purely tentative nature of his metaphysics; but from anyone in the days after Darwin, it is preposterous” (2005a, 125–26). Yet by the time of *Men Like Gods* (1923), Wells’s utopians speak of having had “eugenic beginnings”, of “a new and surer decision in the choice of parents, of an increasing certainty in the science of heredity” (1923, 87). Eugenics here represented the “ultimate step” of conquering nature by making even the biological process of reproduction (and not just the sexual act) subordinate to self-conscious human will. As such, the practice of eugenics is a logical step not only from pedigree breeding in domesticated animals as D-503 claims, but, in addition, from sealing the city off from the realm of nature by means of a (supposedly) impenetrable wall.

The “domesticated” citizens have tightly proscribed boundaries of behaviour, like well-trained (and well bred) dogs. As D- puts it, “Man ceased to be a wild animal only when he built the first wall. Man ceased to be a savage only when we had built the Green Wall, when we had isolated our perfect mechanical world from the irrational, hideous world of trees, birds, animals...” (93). For mankind to cut themselves off completely from this “hideous” and “irrational” world would require the removal of the characteristics enabling humans to survive in such conditions: either through natural selection, artificial selection, or surgical mutilation. Only by being *unable* to go back can the One State ensure that its citizens do not *wish* to go back. But just as the Table of Hours only extends to twenty-two hours of the day, so too the One State is unable to make humankind wholly rationalised, urbanised and domesticated. D-503 sees

an animal through the Green Wall and wonders, "What if he, this yellow-eyed creature, in his disorderly, filthy mound of leaves, in his uncomputed life, is happier than we are?" (93) The question demonstrates the limits of the eugenic processes which have produced D- himself.

### The techniques of Taylorism

To overcome spontaneous, unpredictable individuality and to order citizens' behaviour according to regularised patterns, the One State uses a series of methods and techniques to reduce human life to mathematically manageable numerical values. Every aspect of life is subjected to the scientific management principles of the early twentieth-century American industrial entrepreneur and theorist Frederick Winslow Taylor, whose method of scientific management treated each worker as a quantifiable part of the industrial production process, like any machine. Through experiments including "time and motion" studies Taylorism worked to determine the "one best way" in which a worker could make the fewest movements possible and maximise efficiency, and therefore output. Much like the One State, then, Taylorism relied on specific, tightly ordered organisation of time and space.

Zamyatin's engagement with Taylor is wholly unbalanced and satirical. Taylor's practices were frequently demanding, physically restrictive and primarily aimed to improve profitability, but alongside (and subordinate to) his ruthless efficiency drives he did frequently seek some improvement in wages and conditions to address productivity. Taylor's methods used individualised time and motion studies for workers to get each working on a task to which they were physically and mentally suited, and "to develop each *individual* man to his highest state of efficiency *and prosperity*" (F. W. Taylor 1998, 19 emphasis added). Zamyatin uses Taylor as a straw man to argue against "unfree" movement, leading to the *reductio ad absurdum* of the Numbers performing "fifty chews per mouthful" of petroleum food (literally, McCarthy (1984, 123) notes, turning the One State citizens into machines run on fuel). Zamyatin's primary satirical target here is Lenin, who saw Taylorism as "a way to modernize archaic Russian industry after the Revolution; Taylorism's good, he believed, could be embraced, its evil expunged" (Kanigel 1997, 505). The total social application of Taylorism is a means of satirising the trend towards regulation of all aspects of living in all industrial societies.

Such regulation went beyond economic and legal frameworks to include restrictive cultural practices. In England Zamyatin witnessed what could be termed a "will to conformity" among the inhabitants. There is substantial overlap in both themes and imagery between *We* and his satirical novella *Islanders* written in Newcastle (see Edwards 1982, 38–45 & Myers 1990; 1994, 96, 98–99). In a letter to his wife, Zamyatin complained:

All the streets, all the houses are identical, do you understand me, – completely identical, like the grain barns in Petersburg near the Aleksandr



Nevskii monastery. When we went past, I asked: 'What are those store-houses? – 'They're houses that people live in.' ... Next day it turned out to be possible to go to London; it was about a six-hour journey. And the very same, identical barn-like towns flashed by, shorn to the same zero number. What a terrible lack of imagination.

(quoted in Myers 1990, 95)

In Zamyatin's *Islanders* the narrator calls it a "miracle" that the parishioners of Jesmond, leaving church one Sunday successfully "find their own houses among the thousands of identical houses produced by the factory" (Zamyatin 1984, 23). The author believed that banal, orderly ranks in which "originality is unquestionably criminal" (Zamyatin 1970, 65) were common to England and the Bolshevik Party membership alike, yet he was amazed by the pride the English seemed to take in dull conformity.<sup>14</sup> Zamyatin almost seems to echo Nietzsche's maxim from *Twilight of the Idols*: "Man does not strive after happiness; only the Englishman does that" (Nietzsche 2003, 33). Borne along by the demands of the Great War and new industrial production methods, Zamyatin's treatment of rationalisation in social settings follows a similar conception of utilitarianism as an English "disease".

Alan Myers has pointed to the similarities between the vast glazed Tyne-side shipyard sheds and the avowedly Benthamite architecture of the One State (1993, 425–27), which is a unified glistening tribute to the "nonfreedom" of stasis, of "[i]nseparable two times two" (Zamyatin 1900, 66). As in Bentham's *Panopticon* – which he coincidentally conceived while visiting White Russia – the primary concern of this non-aesthetic of control is to discipline the inhabitants by placing them on permanent display to the state (see Foucault 1995, 169–72). But whereas Bentham's panopticon also sought to isolate prisoners and prevent communication between them, the utilitarian aim of the One State is to create "mathematical happiness" by ensuring that the atomized populace see themselves as members of a vast and endless mass of "numbers".<sup>15</sup>

Zamyatin's icebreakers completed what Francis Bacon (2000, 33) had three hundred years earlier hinted was the purpose of his New Science: to conquer nature. The One State mistakenly believes it has "channelled all the elemental forces – there can be no catastrophes" (Zamyatin 1999, 23). The boast is premised upon an assumption that the citizens of the One State have internalised the state's projected image of itself as a "perfect mechanical world" (93) of "humanized machines, perfect men" (82). This image itself of the mechanical world itself dates back to Bacon's successors in the early Enlightenment such as Isaac Newton, and the One State philosophy uses Enlightenment materialist images of mass and motion to implore each "Number" to "forget that you are a gram and feel yourself instead a millionth of a ton" (115).

At its most extreme, to La Mettrie (1994, 59), man *was* a machine who merely had "a few more cog wheels and springs than in the most perfect

animals, [and a] brain proportionately nearer the heart so it receives more blood", but such imagery also appears in works ranging from Rousseau's *Discourse on Political Economy* to pornographic novels including John Cleland's *Fanny Hill*. In a sense such materialism was the logical consequence when, as Margaret Jacob (1996, 161) puts it, "nature [was] abstractly mechanized and bodies in motion [were] made wholly sufficient". In *We*, this materialist imagery highlights the tension in Enlightenment thought between the ideal of freedom expressed by the likes of Rousseau and (in a rather different mode) Kant, and the ideal of utilitarian happiness expressed by Bentham (which is clearly echoed in the One State). In a moment of obedient thought D- writes, "How could [the ancients] write whole libraries of books about some Kant yet scarcely notice Taylor – that prophet who was able to see ten centuries ahead" (33)? The satirical comparison perhaps reflects on the practical formulation of the Categorical Imperative given by Kant in *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*: "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end" (Kant 1991, 91). While Taylor viewed humans as more or less efficient machines, Kant's approach to philosophy – particularly of the mind – was most un-mechanical. As a transcendental idealist he opposed both pure rationalism and pure empiricism (D. Burnham 2000, 9, 18–19).

The extended Taylor system of the One State establishes internal regulators within the Numbers like an engine's governor, mechanisms intended to prevent the individual from experiencing love or "growing a soul". In demanding total obedience, the state prevents the individual from developing ethical self-autonomy, and the narrative contains an ambiguous, at times contradictory, engagement with Kant's ethical theory. D-503 reads in the *State Gazette* that, "everyone who feels capable of doing so must compose... works extolling the beauty and the grandeur of the One State" (1–2). In response, he writes the diary that forms *We*. This response is compatible with the first formulation of Kant's categorical imperative ("act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law" (Kant 1996, 73 emphasis in original)). He will "merely attempt", D- declares, "to record what I see and think, or, to be more exact *what we think* [...] will it not be, of itself, and regardless of my will or skill, a poem? It will. I believe, I know it" (1–2 emphasis added). Moving from the particular to the general, D- interprets the One State command to apply to him as a constitutive unit of the citizenry and wills that his personal record reflect a universalized consciousness.

However, this consciousness is free from any truly ethical demands towards an "Other". It recognizes no individual within the mass of other numbers, no empathetic sense of shared humanity between one single person and the next. D-503 describes the citizens of the One State marching together during a leisure hour as "[t]housands of feet raining down in time, a million-footed *leviathan*" (Zamyatin 1993, 85 emphasis added). The term "*leviathan*", which

is not used in every translation of the novel, could well be a reference to Hobbes.<sup>16</sup> Yet here it is not a sovereign power that towers over D- as an individual, but rather the citizenry as an overwhelming, undifferentiated mass. When “a dozen or so” Numbers die in an industrial accident during the testing of the *Integral*, D-503 feels pride that the other workers barely notice, as the dead represent “less than one hundred-millionth part of the population of the One State; practically considered, it is an infinitesimal of the third order” (107–8).

That the rebellion is ethical, as well as being aligned to individuality, is underlined when by contrast I-330 stakes the success of the revolution on gaining control of the *Integral's* test flight in an attempt to prevent precisely twelve of the Mephi in the hands of the One State from being executed (172). I-330 is therefore overjoyed when she learns that D-503 interceded to protect a woman who was protesting against the violent treatment of prisoners from the Guardians. She believes that D-503 has become a humanitarian rebel. As Barratt (1984, 349) notes, the irony of which only the reader of D-'s diary is aware is that D- only acted because he mistook the woman for I-330. “In her own mistaken belief that D- has become a rebel, she supplies him with the very reward he most desires: the ‘fearless hero’ receives a protestation of ‘love’ from the ‘grateful heroine’”. The two thus “collude” in a game of mutual self-deception destined to a tragic conclusion. After she leads him astray through blackmail, I- believes that D- has become a self-autonomous ethical agent; in reality he never really abandons his “mathematical-moral” utilitarianism. The conflict dramatises opposing ideologies as well as desires, ideas as well as interests. I-330 does not ultimately want to coerce D-503, but to convert him to her cause (Barratt 1984, 348).

## Utopia

The rebellion of Mephi sympathisers is only thinkable as a result of major errors the One State commits as a result of its sense of strength. If, as indicated above, the *Integral* project is at odds with the One State ideology, then this mistake is compounded by the official request for a creative cargo whose immediate consequences are to encourage creativity, solitude and social dreaming. Belatedly realising the damage, the state attempts to solve the crisis by removing the dangerous imagination of each and every one of its citizens.

The One State is a totalised image of absolute power conceived as a satirical reflection of contemporary anxieties in Russia as well as Zamyatin's experience of the West (and specifically England). Cracks in the One State ideology are clear to the reader – although not the narrator – from the very opening. What leads D-503 into unwitting rebellion is his creative practice, which has the ability to transform the artist just as it works to uncover the fault lines in One State ideology and power structures. Writing as a creative practice is presented as a powerful and apparently utopian transformative force.

Yet even while professing the radical openness of his vision of the “spiral” of historical and artistic change Yevgeny Zamyatin categorically denied that his work was utopian. In an essay on H. G. Wells in the mid-1920s,<sup>17</sup> Zamyatin asserted:

There are two generic and invariable features that characterize utopias. One is content: the authors of utopias paint what they consider to be ideal societies[...] The other feature, organically growing out of the content, is to be found in the form: a utopia is always static; it is always descriptive, and has no, or almost no, plot dynamics.

(1970, 286)

This formal description of utopias strikingly anticipates Jameson's comment in *The Seeds of Time* (1994, 55–56) that “dystopia is generally a narrative, which happens to a specific subject or character, whereas the Utopian text is mostly nonnarrative.” Jameson here sees utopian fiction as allied to travel literature and as a type of “blueprint” for a “machine” consisting of a fixed set of inter-related parts that make up an externally knowable and describable totality (an *anti-utopia*, for Jameson, would therefore more closely resemble the machine of Kafka's “In the Penal Colony” than a dystopia like *Nineteen Eighty-Four*). An inexorable consequence of this view is that utopia entails an End of History – a view that Jameson reiterates more forcefully in *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005, 7).

Unlike Jameson however, Zamyatin sees utopia in a negative light, castigating it as “sugary pink”. He confuses what more precisely might be termed *cockaigne* or at best *arcadia* (not just “ideal” but Edenic) with the more general category of “utopia”. Zamyatin therefore absurdly claims that Wells's only utopia is *Men like Gods* (1923) (a logical consequence of which is that works like *A Modern Utopia* (1905) should not be classed as utopian). Zamyatin's point seems to be that a dynamic plot and narrative impetus can rescue a text from the “sugary pink” category of the programmatic utopia.<sup>18</sup> Through immediacy of action, in William Hutchings' words Zamyatin “deliberately avoids the leisurely pace of most reminiscences – a pace that is manifestly inappropriate in the newly heralded age of dynamic speed” (1982, 83). *We* explores political thought not through the extensive diagesis common to fin-de-siècle utopias, but instead through a tightly controlled symbolic schema and imaginative description, which orientates the reader toward an open future. In comparison, a novel like Wells's *In the Days of the Comet* (1906) is “an essentially *static* and retrospective account of actions and conflicts that occurred in the narrator's distant past and are now recollected in the relative tranquility of old age” (Hutchings 1982, 83).<sup>19</sup> Whereas Wells's novel ends with the narrative framing of the unnamed reader of Willie's transcript looking out of the window at the transformed *and completed* world of tomorrow, the diary of D-503 ends as it starts, *in medias res*, with a question mark over whether the One State will succeed in crushing the rebellion.

I suggest that Zamyatin's opposition to "utopia" can be profitably seen as a terminological issue rather than a conceptual one. Wells's socio-fantastic novels, Zamyatin argues, are "almost solely instruments for exposing defects of the existing social order, rather than building a picture of a future paradise" and as such are to be regarded as "social tracts in the form of novels" (1970, 286). For Zamyatin the genealogy of these works therefore includes works central to the Anglophone utopian canon such as Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726; amended 1735), and Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871), but only in terms of the "approach to the theme – not the theme itself, and not the literary methods employed" (1970, 287).

With this in mind, we can position Zamyatin's dystopian novel as a narrative of world politics grounded in utopianism: Zamyatin regards "sugary pink", "ideal" utopias as "bear[ing] a + sign" whereas most of Wells's "social fantasies bear the - sign" (Zamyatin 1970, 286). In his essay "On Synthesisism", meanwhile, he states that,

These are the three schools in art, and there are no others. Affirmation, negation, and synthesis – the negation of the negation.

(1970, 81)

If utopia represents the thesis and Wells's social fantasies the antithesis, then Zamyatin may well have regarded *We* as the synthesis, the negation of the negation.<sup>20</sup> Such a reading would see the novel as mediating between present, past and future in providing a critique of the culture and politics of the present othered into a supposedly ideal distant future, using this very distance to create irony and satire. This critique is structured by dialectical engagement with past thinkers such as Nietzsche, Hegel and especially Kant, alongside contemporary literary figures like H. G. Wells. Negotiating the relationship of the political and the aesthetic Zamyatin uses dystopia as a hermeneutic tool to read patterns of cultural and social change. Placing his criticism within a theory of never ending revolution he attempts to criticise the trajectory of the modern world without foreclosing the possibility of transformational political change. In chapter three, we shall see how Huxley continued to develop dystopia as a mode of critique and satire through formal literary experiments and fragmentation. His novel *Brave New World*, however, takes a more cynical view of the structural forces of history and the possibilities opened through utopian thought.

## Notes

- 1 These translations include a re-translation into Russian published in Prague, which Zamyatin later publicly stated was unauthorized. However, Julie Curtis (2013, 164) suggests he may have been aware of the plan to publish a "mangled and incomplete" version of the text.
- 2 The first expressions of Russian symbolism in the 1890s had deep Parisian connections, with Bryusov in particular taking inspiration from Rimbaud and

- Mallarmé, and publishing a translation of Verlaine's *Romances sur Paroles*. Meanwhile, younger writers including "Blok and Vyacheslav Ivanov as well as Bely distanced themselves from Bryusov and Balmont. Blok... condemned Bryusov as decadent", echoing previous dismissals of French symbolism in Western Europe by conservative figures (Wellek 1970, 261–2).
- 3 There are a variety of available translations of *We*. As I refer extensively to Ginsburg's translations of Zamyatin's essays, for the sake of consistency I also use her translation of *We* (unless otherwise indicated). All further references to Ginsburg's translation of *We* will be to Zamyatin 1999 and will appear with only the relevant page reference cited. I also follow Ginsburg's Russian transliterations of names and terms except in quotations where original spellings are retained.
  - 4 Although the two were on friendly terms (see Curtis 2013, 106), Shklovsky's review of *We* condemned Zamyatin's "one-sided ability" and with pointed irony threw Zamyatin's image of the freedom of the aeroplane back at him, referring to him as a plane that had reached its "ceiling". (Shklovsky 1988, 49–50).
  - 5 Zamyatin's comparison of the (Russian) symbolists' "surgical" approach with the realists' essentially romantic view is congruent with Walter Benjamin's comparison of painter and cinematographer in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction": "magician and surgeon compare to painter and cameraman. The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web" (1999, 227).
  - 6 On the importance of synecdoche in *We*, see Borenstein (1996).
  - 7 Richard Gregg (1965, 687) claims that ironically, rather than die like Christ for the freedom of mankind, D-503 lives to ensure their continued slavery.
  - 8 Arguing against the methodology of Feuerbach and post-Hegelian Idealism more generally, Marx wrote, "In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here it is a matter of ascending from earth to heaven" (Marx and Engels 1976, 36).
  - 9 Rooney approaches Zamyatin as a Marxist, but her discussion of Nietzsche and Zamyatin is still valuable. See also Beehler (1986).
  - 10 In *Proud Man* (1993), Katharine Burdekin also inverts the narrative strategy of Wells' Time Traveller. See p. 116.
  - 11 On Einstein and general relativity in *We* and early Soviet society, see Leatherbarrow (1987).
  - 12 It is significant given that Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is consciously inspired by *We* that Winston Smith's first rebellious act is to write a diary.
  - 13 Kant (1996, 427) charmingly described marriage as "the union of two persons of different sexes for lifelong possession of each other's sexual attributes".
  - 14 In *We*, I-330 mocks D-503 by stating, "to be original is to violate equality. And that which in the language of the ancients was called 'being banal' is with us mere the fulfilment of our duty" (28).
  - 15 Thus, D-503 comments: "seven o'clock, time to get up. On the right and the left through the glass walls I see myself, my room, my clothes, my movements – repeated a thousand times over. This is bracing: you feel yourself a part of a great, powerful, single entity" (33). D-503 lives as if surrounded by mirrors, seeing his own actions replicated by thousands of others. This is seductively narcissistic; he is part of an "immense, powerful" collective. Yet simultaneously the glass dominates and isolates D- by delineating a limit: to quote Lacan (1992, 151) on the mirror-stage, it is "that which cannot be crossed". D- feels empowered by that which in reality subjugates him, and when divorced from the social body he feels isolated like a "human finger cut off" (103).
  - 16 The Russian is Левиафан (*Leviafan*) meaning, Barratt notes, the "legendary sea monster frequently mentioned in [ancient] Hebrew poetry" (Zamyatin 1994, 141 n. 53). This is the same word normally used to render Hobbes's work into Russian.

Ginsburg's choice of "monster" (Zamyatin 1999, 87) is therefore unusual among translations of the novel. Natasha Randall (Zamyatin 2007, 77) renders it "leviathan", as does Russell (2000, 77) and Brown (Zamyatin 1993, 85). Guernsey (Zamyatin 1972, 93) also concurs, but additionally provides a footnote offering "behemoth" – the same word which Zilboorg (Zamyatin 1975, 83) opts for. Although we cannot be certain Zamyatin is directly referring to Hobbes, it seems highly likely.

- 17 The editor Mira Ginsburg dates this essay 1922, but as the essay directly references H. G. Wells' 1923 novel *Men Like Gods* this is not tenable.
- 18 It is also worth bearing in mind that Zamyatin is responding to a very particular strain of Soviet "blueprint" utopianism built upon industry, electrification and (what would by the mid-1920s become known as) constructivist architecture. His intention here is surely therefore to deny the possibility of a "final revolution" as outlined above.
- 19 In (implicitly) denying that *In the Days of the Comet* belongs to the utopian genre, Zamyatin would (one suspects) hone in on the love triangle which is foregrounded in the plot.
- 20 This use of mathematical symbols as metaphor may itself (consciously or unconsciously) be drawn from Wells. In *A Modern Utopia* (2005a, 29) Wells declares, "individual liberty in a community is not, as mathematicians would say, always of the same sign". In Zamyatin's novel, meanwhile, in a biting satire of Cheka, D-503 contrasts the "Operational Section" of the One State to the Catholic Inquisition, stating, "one has a + sign, the other a -" (1999, 80).

### 3 Experiments, with sex and drugs

#### Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*

##### Introduction

Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) opens in a future that has seen the victory of applied science, engineering and technology, superficially catering for all human needs and desires. As Theodor Adorno (1967) noted, although the World State is stable and prosperous, the uniform happiness of its citizens, which revolves around consumerism, casual sex and the designer recreational drug "soma", is manifestly false. Moreover, the ceaseless repetition of spectacularly excessive consumption and over-stimulated sensory gratification is presented as ever more dull and quotidian. Huxley uses his future world of pointless distractions as a space to experiment with a variety of literary techniques; to explore aesthetics, politics, science and psychology; and to ground his work in the historical context of the early 1930s. His employment of a fragmentary "contrapuntal" writing style enables him to hold in focus both a critical examination of the cultural and political confusion of his own day and a satirical probing of the trajectory these historical forces are leading toward beneath the fug of drugs and sex that pervades the narrative. His meticulous attention to literary form underpins political thought throughout the text. As the discussion of Zamyatin's *We* in the previous chapter showed, by exploring an author's use of form, narrative and literary techniques it is possible to sketch a richer and more detailed picture of the political debate in which the novel engages. Dystopian narratives often historicise the present by viewing it as an object of knowledge largely beyond the grasp of inhabitants of a future society: information about the authorial present is often fragmented, sketchy or else clouded by propaganda and political mythology in the *future-as-past*. Here, I further develop this line of enquiry by focusing on how Huxley uses literary devices, narrative structure and formal experimentation to explore complex temporal relationships both within and beyond his story worlds.

I begin by exploring some elements of historical context Huxley was concerned with in his writing. Huxley's journalism and letters reveal ambivalent attitudes toward questions of class in the context of the Great Depression, when members of the scientific circles he was connected with professed interest in eugenics. Huxley negotiates these debates deftly and with humour in



*Brave New World*, without ever moving beyond the confusion of conflicting ideas. Huxley is concerned with showing how contradictory approaches exert influence in the production of a future that appears outwardly foreclosed to the political possibility of further change.

The ability of any hegemonic ideological apparatus to re-produce its values as natural and thus foreclosed to change is underlined in Huxley's novel via his references to myrmecology. Huxley uses ant imagery to explore relations of consumption, production and need. At the heart of Huxley's project is a typically liberal humanist concern with the concept of "need" in both political and aesthetic terms. Here I build on Adorno's (1967) critique of happiness and mass production in *Brave New World* to argue that Huxley's thought is limited by its crude reification of happiness as opposed to "meaningful" culture. Notwithstanding this, Adorno's interpretation contains only a limited engagement with Huxley's discussion of psychology. As a corrective, this chapter links together issues found in William James's approach to the experience of emotion, Freud's description of feeling as sensation, and behaviourist John B. Watson's attempts to control behavioural and affective responses to external stimuli. Finally, I highlight Huxley's debt to Italian social and political theorist Vilfredo Pareto to show how some of the satirical episodes in the narrative of *Brave New World* are built upon characters failing to distinguish between Pareto's concepts of logical, non-logical and irrational action. Huxley's characters are no more clueless in this respect than political actors of his own day.

*Brave New World* is a text which should be read as belonging to what Raymond Williams (1979, 60) termed the "black amalgam" of political ideas in the early 1930s in addition to literary modernism. Working within and through the conventions of the dystopian genre, Huxley explores the limits of formal and thematic experiments that can be performed in such a space. As Joanne Woiak (2007, 124) puts it, the novel "offers a sophisticated critique of how scientific knowledge emerges from and in turn serves the social, political, and economic agendas of those in power". Huxley's dystopia is a novel of ideas marked by literary modernism as well as social, political, cultural and scientific debates of the early 1930s.

### **From 1932 AD to 632 AF**

*Brave New World* is a novel of three societies. The first, at the level of the narrative frame, is the dystopian World State. Marx's famous analysis of the industrial workman existing in an inverted relationship to industrial plant, as an appendage to the machine *for* which he works (Marx and Engels 1992, 10) is here carried to its logical end: babies are now carried to term not viviparously but "with a faint humming of machinery" in the "red darkness" of a factory (A. Huxley 2005, 62).<sup>1</sup> Lenina Crowne works on this production line, ensuring that foetuses are given the correct stimulants, blood surrogates and poisons at various stages of their development so that they are physically and

mentally adapted to whichever caste they are “decanted” into (no one suffers the “trauma” of birth anymore). Her latest lover Bernard Marx, the novel's protagonist, is an insecure alpha plus specialist in “hypnopaedic conditioning” – the indoctrination of children while they are asleep.

The second society is that of “Malpais”, the New Mexico Savage Reservation where John the Savage grows up and enjoys an ambivalent but loving relationship with his mother, the beta-minus Brave New Worlder Linda. This enclave within the World State is a closed, anachronistic society, which practices magic and bloody, penitent ritual, absorbing elements of Christianity into its hybridisation of Native American religious practices. Religion is at the heart of this society just as science is the pneumatic blood pump of the World State. When Bernard Marx brings Linda and John to London, John becomes a celebrity, but as his host it is Bernard who enjoys the trappings of this fame while John rejects World State values. After Linda dies and John starts a riot implicating Bernard and his friend Helmholtz Watson, the latter two are banished to remote islands while John escapes London to live a penitent life in an abandoned air-lighthouse in rural Surrey. The press find him, drawing a crowd that includes Lenina. Enraged at becoming an exotic object of voyeurism, John physically and sexually assaults her, precipitating an orgy after which he hangs himself.

The two societies in which the novel is set are thrown into relief by a third: the ever present and always denied past – Huxley's present. *Brave New World* needs to be understood as a narrative that mediates between these different temporalities. As we saw in the introduction, such mediation is a characteristic of dystopian fiction. It is one means by which the genre is expressly political writing. Huxley's novel takes the concern with the political implications of such mediation to its zenith. The London landmarks in the novel tie the critique and satire to the early 1930s as much as to any imagined future, however the success of the novel as both critique and literary achievement is in part due to the remarkably adept way in which Huxley integrates different spaces and temporalities together into the story. Indeed, the performative structure of the novel is crucially important to grasping its value to our understanding of political theory in the 1930s.

In chapter three, Mustapha Mond gives a history lesson to a group of students which exposes the heartless nature of the World State. Here, Huxley experiments with a technique he had previously termed “counterpoint” or “contrapuntal narrative”, in which he creates a montage of multiple scenes, flitting back and forth between a conversation between Henry Foster and the Assistant Predestinator, the inner monologue of Bernard Marx as he eavesdrops on them, a conversation between Lenina and Fanny, Mond's history lesson, and a description of “hypnopaedic conditioning” in the Conditioning Centre.<sup>2</sup> Huxley switches between registers without warning, from changing-room gossip to Mond absurdly linking his authoritative account of past terrors with an argument in favour of suppressing knowledge of the world before the founding of the World State. In so doing he provides just sufficient

information for the reader to form an idea of how the World State was created, without presenting a coherent sequence of causally related events.

The reader is thereby drawn into a game of trying to form a picture of the historical content of what I termed in the introduction the “future-as-past” – that time between the present in which Huxley wrote and the narrative frame of the World State (see also Stock 2016). In gesturing toward this future period, Huxley plays on cultural and social anxieties of the early 1930s such as the fear of future European war in which civilians in major cities could be targeted with chemical and biological weapons from the air.

The contrapuntal montage of chapter three is perhaps the most obvious and condensed formal experiment of the sort which helps characterise modernist literature, but Huxley interweaves a variety of discursive types and linguistic registers throughout the novel. In particular, the text frequently shifts back and forth between conversation and free indirect discourse. This is important not only in literary terms but also as a means by which Huxley engages with social and political ideas. When Bernard and Lenina meet the Warden of the Savage Reservation, for example, described by the narrator as “a mine of irrelevant information and unasked-for good advice”, the information he imparts actually helps the reader to build up contextual understanding of the contents of the reservation, the culture of its inhabitants and their relationship to the World State. Echoing Mustapha Mond’s easy reeling off of statistics from the future-as-past in chapter three such as “eight hundred Simple Lifers were mowed down by machine guns at Golders Green” (55), the Warden begins by describing the “upwards of five thousand kilometres of fencing at sixty thousand volts” which ensures that “there is no escape from a Savage Reservation”. Sinister as this is, the scene is set into comedic relief by the responses of both Lenina and Bernard: Lenina has “inconspicuously swallowed half a gramme of *soma*, with the result that she could now sit, serenely not listening, thinking of nothing at all, but with her large blue eyes fixed on the Warden’s face in an expression of rapt attention”. Meanwhile, “for no apparent reason, Bernard suddenly remembered that he had left the Eau-de-Cologne tap in his bathroom wide open and running”, and in his mind begins obsessing about what this will cost him (“A decilitre of Eau de Cologne every minute. Six litres an hour”).<sup>3</sup> Using the inner monologues of Lenina and Bernard allows Huxley to compress the Warden’s speech using ellipses and aposiopesis (incomplete sentences): “families... no conditioning... monstrous superstitions... Christianity and totemism and ancestor worship... extinct languages, such as Zuni and Spanish and Athapascan... pumas, porcupines and other ferocious animals... infectious diseases... priests... venomous lizards...” (98–100). The listing adds to the impression of a droning voice but the sense of passing time is also reinforced by Bernard’s anxiety over every wasted second and – conversely – Lenina’s “holiday” *outside* of time on her *soma* trip. The Warden’s speech serves as an orientation not for the vacationing couple so much as the reader, who is called upon to piece together information about the “savage” life and how it is viewed by the wardens

who police it, and more importantly about the processes by which remnants of past cultures have clung on to survive in an amalgamated and convoluted form in the future World State, imprisoned within a Reservation where few *Brave New Worlders* ever venture.

### Historical context and historical patterns

"A book about the future", Huxley reminded his readers in his 1946 preface to the novel, "can interest us only if its prophecies look as though they might conceivably come true" (7–8). Huxley's great achievement was to synthesize into a future World State society many disparate and contradictory ideas from his own, a confusing cacophony that reflected the dangers and fears of the modern world. He was able to do so because he had conducted extensive research for a series of articles immediately prior to writing *Brave New World* in 1931, touring coalmines, chemical works and other key sites in the industrial heartlands of England. Biographer Nicholas Murray (2003, 248) describes Huxley returning to Sanary to pen *Brave New World* with "the sights and sounds and smells of modern industrial society in a depression... fully in his consciousness".

On his trip Huxley was awestruck by the sheer scale of ICI Billingham chemical plant, terming it a "vast cooperative work of art" (2001, 277). He was impressed by the eloquence of Durham miners and in Whitechapel was taken aback by a young, "highly cultured and intelligent" kosher slaughterer. There, in a rag merchant's living room, while the hostesses played Bach preludes and sang Schubert the *schochet* gave Huxley an erudite Marxist analysis of the works of D.H. Lawrence (2001, 300–301). But these unnamed guides remain "alien" and "other" in Huxley's reports for the upmarket *Nash's Pall Mall Magazine*. He even compares the growth of Middlesbrough to that of fungus or "staphylococcus in a test-tube of chicken broth". His horror of the sight of vast numbers of unemployed men is even more revealing of unshakeable class prejudices: "Crowds of unemployed men... fill the streets... with their slow interminable procession. Dead men walking, walking from nowhere in particular to nowhere else, aimlessly and in silence... no ghost could be quite so terrifying as these spectres of flesh and blood who walk the streets of our northern cities" (2001, 270–71).

If Huxley is happy to describe the real unemployed working-class northern men he encountered with the full gothic terror of the undead, in *Brave New World* the "Epsilon-Minus Semi-Morons" are merely relegated to the status of animals: the unnamed "small simian creature" dressed in black who operates the lift in the London Hatcheries, repeatedly cries the word "Roof!" like a barking dog on seeing daylight before descending back into "the twilight of his own habitual stupor" (64–65). All such "lower caste" members are short, physically adapted to manual labour but mentally stunted, and they look almost exactly the same due to the "Bokanovsky" process of "embryo budding", which produces up to 96 sets of identical twins from a single egg. As

Woiak (2007, 113) notes, in essays and correspondence in the late 1920s and early 1930s, "Huxley voiced opinions about the supposedly widening gulf between cultured brain workers and uncultured manual workers that illustrated his affinity with hereditarian Anglo-American eugenicists". There is certainly a tension frequently seen in his journalism work that one also encounters in influential left-leaning scientists of the period. Huxley found "extraordinary strength and vitality, a passion for higher things" among members of the working class he met in 1931 (A. Huxley 2001, 301), but such individuals are absent from *Brave New World*. This "exclusion of the masses", leads John Carey (1992, 21) to read *Brave New World* as a savage attack upon mass culture and a proclamation of the superiority of individual feeling and high culture. He polemically argues that the "genesis" of Huxley's novel was to "show that, bad as mass misery is, mass happiness would be worse" (1992, 87).

Like Mustapha Mond, who "whisk[s]" away the achievements and civilisations of the past with a casual wave of his hand (41), Carey's overall assessment glides over the specific historical context and content of the politics Huxley criticises, in particular Soviet Communism and Italian Fascism. By 1932, Stalin's dictatorial dominance, the strict "regimentation" of the workforce, and state trials of former leaders were all well reported in the West.<sup>4</sup> To Huxley Communism had taken on a "religious" character, and in his play *Now More Than Ever* (never produced in Huxley's lifetime), a Communist character at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park cries that revolution is "a religion, it's a man's whole life, it's the reason why he exists" (A. Huxley 2000, 33).<sup>5</sup>

Huxley likewise suffered no illusions about fascism. He lived in Italy under Mussolini's dictatorship, and he met Oswald Mosley in Paris. He mercilessly mocks Mosley throughout his 1928 novel *Point Counter Point* using the thinly veiled caricature Everard Webley (a far more impressive and enthralling figure than Mosley himself), who is eventually brutally murdered near the end of the narrative (A. Huxley 1928, 516). While Carey is correct then that *Brave New World* satirises consumerism and mass leisure activities, this should be seen as operating within a wider attack on what Huxley saw as the "mass" ideologies of Soviet Communism and Fascism. Indeed, Huxley was prepared to see Britain go well beyond "the most careful and systematic national planning", for which his friend John Maynard Keynes argued to avoid the dangers of both, paradoxically arguing that even methods based on "unconstitutionally" applied "force" should be considered (A. Huxley 2001, 272–73).

Huxley's future society is premised upon a synthesis of disparate, competing ideas, and in this specific sense the novel is deeply realistic: the range of ideas that influence history are inevitably contradictory. At the same time, the inequalities of the caste hierarchy and the sustained oppression of all citizens of the World State point to Huxley's scepticism toward any dialectical pattern of history – a position in direct contrast to that of Yevgeny Zamyatin, as encountered in chapter two. Huxley's playful conflation of historical meta-narratives highlights his belief that such epistemological viewpoints are

limited in relying on teleological views of history. Put crudely, for Huxley "abstract" theories are bound to have unintended consequences when implemented in the "real" world.

The contradictions of *Brave New World* are foregrounded in characters' names: the idealist, vain but rebellious (Bernard) Marx, conformist Lenin(a), Helmholtz Watson (named after John B. Watson), Mustapha Mond (Alfred Mond was Chair of ICI Chemicals), and the god-like figure of Ford (sometimes conflated with Freud). In a foreword to the novel, Christopher Hitchens argues that this borrowing of names is "stodgy and heavy rather than ironic" (in A. Huxley 2005, xi). Huxley's conglomeration of famous names is symptomatic of his "plague-on-all-your-houses approach" to satire (Ferns 1999, 108),<sup>6</sup> but given the sceptical interplay of ideas which characterises the narrative of *Brave New World* this is surely more than a (not-so) sly jab at the dignity of these historical figures by using their names in an alternative and silly setting. Their use suggests these figures have worked an influence on the contemporary World State, which in turn makes a statement about world historical change. In contrast to Zamyatin's belief in a dialectical path of history, Huxley hints that a strength of capitalism is its ability to commodify and envelop radical ideas, watering them down until something that at first stood distinct from and in opposition to the system becomes an integral part of it.

Huxley's World State is the child of twentieth-century actors upon the world stage, the weird bastard offspring of state socialism and mass capitalism, as embodied by the likes of Lenin, Ford, Alfred Mond, John B. Watson and others. The children of *Brave New World* are named for their society's forefathers, the "Great Men" whose names have become synonymous with the movements, companies and states they led. The fictional world-order is stamped with the birthmark of the chaotic and contradictory world of the 1930s. But if this is a society that has achieved a "really revolutionary revolution", of the sort Huxley argues was envisaged by the Marquis de Sade (8–9), then that revolution comprises the final victory of humankind over nature through the application of science. In 1928, Huxley's friends Robert Nichols and Maurice Browne had written a play exploring the political consequences of the discovery of nuclear fission by a naïve but brilliant physicist who exclaims, "I have no position. I am a scientist – that is simply a mind, the Mind of Man, if you like" (Nichols and Browne 1932, 14). The Kantian ideal of the *disinterested* scientist as a voice of reason is replaced in *Brave New World* by *uninterested* and apathetic scientists. Most of the named characters in *Brave New World* are scientists, but with the notable exceptions of Helmholtz Watson and Mustapha Mond (and to a more limited extent Bernard Marx), they are mere technocrats with no vision of how science intersects with public policy. As Huxley's friend Bertrand Russell once argued, such scientists "facilitate centralization and propaganda", and under their reign "groups become more organized, more disciplined, more group-conscious, and more docile to leaders" (1925, 33–34). *Brave New World* not only arises from the confusion of competing

political systems of the early 1930s, but also from competing models of scientific knowledge and advancement.

### Myrmecology

Huxley was a personal friend and correspondent to leading figures of the “science and society” movement of the 1920s and 1930s (or what Woiak (2007, 110) calls the “scientific Left”), such as J. B. S. Haldane, Joseph Needham and Bertrand Russell. Drawing on Bradshaw (1994) Woiak argues that the paternalistic socialism and frequently elitist discussion of eugenics of this circle was profoundly influential on Huxley when he was writing *Brave New World*. In exploring the group, Krishan Kumar (1987) discusses in detail a variety of works pertinent to the themes of *Brave New World* such as Haldane’s *Daedalus, or Science and the Future* (1924); Russell’s blistering response *Icarus, or the Future of Science* (1924); and J. D. Bernal’s *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* (1929). Such works hotly debated the transformative potential of the scientific method when applied to social problems as well as the potential of scientific advancement to fundamentally alter the characteristics of humanity as such (e.g. through “ectogenesis” and eugenics). However, Kumar’s analysis remains at some distance from the text of Huxley’s novel and his perceptive summary of Haldane, Russell, Bernal et al. is not tied directly to any specific parts of the narrative. As such he does not show explicitly how Huxley engages with the “science and society” debates and to what end, leaving his analysis to serve merely “to indicate the perturbation among literary and humanist intellectuals stirred up by the strong claims of scientists in these years” (Kumar 1987, 233).<sup>7</sup>

Surprisingly, the influence on Aldous Huxley of his brother Julian (a biologist and writer of popular science books) has received less critical attention than those of Haldane et al. I argue the direct influence of Julian’s work is important to Aldous Huxley’s social and political thought. Charlotte Sleight (2007) notes that the terms in which Julian Huxley describes the process of *trophallaxis* in his book *Ants* (1930) precisely mirrors the social economy of the drug *soma* in *Brave New World*. Trophallaxis describes the processes of exchange between ants of various life stages, other life forms, and the wider environment. Myrmecologist William Morten Wheeler (1865–1937) first described such an exchange in the process whereby nurse ants feeding larvae lick up substances (described by Wheeler as “honey-dew”) that the larvae secrete. Thus “social relations depended on the stable feeding possibilities that the larvae provided for adults rather than on any kind of adult duty toward the young or the group” (Sleight 2007, 79). In Aldous Huxley’s novel, this link is made explicit when Henry Foster and Lenina pass “the grounds of the Internal and External Secretion Trust” near the golf course, and hear “the lowing of those thousands of cattle which provided, with their hormones and their milk, the raw materials for the great factory at Farnham Royal” (75). To take Sleight’s point further, one of the functions which she indicates that Wheeler ascribed to

trophallactic exchange between larvae and workers is the regulation of the size of the colony: "the more larvae they partially starved, the more worker ants they would produce. The more workers to forage, the larger the trophophonic field that would yield food. The more food, the more eggs laid and larvae hatched. And so on" (Sleigh 2007, 83). Such a process is at work in the regulated production of new workers through *in vitro* human reproduction and constant social conditioning. Via this means the World State supplies biologically specialised and socially determined workers to order.

By way of this reductive model of social relations based upon the "economics" of insects, the World State creates model workers who are also model consumers. It is significant in this regard that Henry Foster and Lenina Crowne go on a golfing date in Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire, home of the American-style Stoke Park Country Club. By 1930 the Club featured eight grass and two hard tennis courts, croquet lawns, two full size golf courses, and an 18-hole putting course. The official company history stresses the exclusive nature of the club in the 1930s, but it was a vast estate capable of drawing large numbers of players as it was only an hour from London on major road and train lines and close to Slough, a growing centre of secondary industry where Club owner Sir Noel Mobbs made his fortune as an industrial landlord (Pugh 2008, 155, 189, 190). Huxley presses home his use of trophophonic imagery when their helicopter climbs above the crowds, and Lenina and Henry see "[t]he approaches to the monorail station were black with the *ant-like pullulation* of lower-caste activity" (76, *emphasis added*). These overt references to trophallaxis demonstrate Huxley's understanding that the biological and social conditioning which reproduce the lower castes as mass producers are also essential to determining their rigid patterns of consumption.

In fact, these patterns are so rigid that in the World State socially determined desires become compulsive psychological needs. In chapter two of the novel, the Director of the London Hatcheries declares, "We condition the masses to hate the country... But simultaneously we condition them to love all country sports". The "masses" spend a large chunk of their wages regularly visiting the countryside, but only to "consume manufactured articles as well as transport" (31). In a society in which the word "infantile" is a compliment, everyone has access to every kind of luxury they *could* want, but only because the state is able to tightly control what each caste desires.<sup>8</sup> In consequence, the state maintains sterile social harmony. "Feeling lurks in that interval of time between desire and its consummation", warns the World Controller, Mustapha Mond. "Shorten that interval, break down all those old unnecessary barriers" (49). The key to preventing social unrest in Huxley's dystopian future is to prevent the arising of unconsummated desire. At the linguistic level, the possibility of even articulating an unsatisfied need becomes impossible: "want" ceases to be expressive of "need" (as in the phrase "in want of a good night's sleep") and assumes the role solely of expressing desire (as in the phrase "I want to have her"). Because desire is centrally stimulated and controlled by the World State, it is limited to that which can be more or



less immediately obtained. The emotional and psychological problems of twentieth-century life have not been solved so much as negated.

If gratification is ever delayed or denied, then *soma* negates the original need or desire by making the individual forget about it. As Sleight (2007, 88) notes:

The capacity of the shared honey-dew to pacify the individual, and thereby to maintain the greater harmony of the colony, meant that it performed exactly the same function as the ubiquitous drug of Aldous Huxley's novel. Although freely available from the State, characters in the book gave soma to one other [sic], quoting one of the relevant phatic aphorisms they had been taught from childhood. 'A gramme is better than a damn.' 'A gramme in time saves nine'.

In other words, it is not simply that the psychoactive properties of the drug itself pacify the individual, but that through the mechanism of social exchange of the drug a set of rules governing what constitutes normative behaviour is established and socially enforced. Any time that a character steps outside normative behavioural codes, the response of other *better-socialised* characters is to offer them *soma*. It is likewise *soma* gas that police use to calm the riot in the hospital which John Savage causes.

### **The politics and aesthetics of need**

While the exchange of *soma* functions as a social glue that negates emotional and psychological problems, it is not sufficient to negate the need for cultural expression and in the World State mass culture and *soma* work in synthesis to overcome the lack of the art that Huxley believed to be essential to humanity: writing in *Vanity Fair*, he stated in 1929 that "good art" existed to satisfy "fundamental needs of the human spirit... such as the desire for beauty, for heightened experience, for knowledge of reality and also for escape from reality". But all of these needs can be superficially satisfied by "swindlers" who "mimi[c]... the sublimest creations". In a consciously elitist passage, Huxley asserts that the London music-hall audiences of the late 1920s lack a "certain artistic sensibility", and therefore readily lap up such superficial satisfaction indiscriminately (A. Huxley 2001, 17–18). This tendency is extrapolated in *Brave New World*, where faith, hope and the consoling function of art have disappeared because gratification is immediate. When human beings are denied need or what Mustapha Mond calls the "right to be unhappy" (215) the result, in the World State, is a regression to puerile and erotically motivated wants – in other words, false needs.

The problem with this system of false needs, as Theodor Adorno (1967, 110) points out, is that "in his critique of false needs Huxley preserves the idea of the objectivity of happiness". The falsely created needs of *Brave New World* leave the characters of the novel in some indefinable way unsatisfied, a

feeling that they can only repress with more *soma*. Huxley's World State is a society made possible through totalitarian psychological conditioning devices such as hypnopaedia, but to create sufficient dramatic tension to drive the narrative of the novel he has to give his characters psyches that have resisted in some way the totality of this conditioning. Many of the characters' psyches indeed show signs of an imminent and perhaps even dangerous unravelling: Bernard likes solitude, monogamy and being unconventional; Lenina resents, and is psychologically damaged by, her constant submission to the convention of promiscuity; Helmholtz is a free-thinking and voluntarily ascetic individual; Henry Foster is troubled by the turning of corpses into fertilizer; and even Mustapha Mond recognises the demonstrable falseness of the values on which he runs society. Huxley has created a totality which is not a totality; his nightmare "perfected" world is something far less than "perfect" because its intelligentsia constantly resist its reproduction. These alpha and beta citizens share a nagging feeling that all is not well despite appearances to the contrary, a feeling that – to quote Bloch (1988) – "Something's Missing". This "something" is to Huxley the possibility of tragedy, and it is here that his defence of high cultural forms becomes the basis of both an aesthetic and a political attack. In a world in which history cannot repeat itself as tragedy but *only* as farce there is no possibility for either art or political action to speak to a shared experience of the human condition. John Savage's comment that the citizens of the World State need "something with tears for a change. Nothing costs enough here" (214) is loaded with dramatic irony that points toward his own suicide at the novel's end. To the reader, Savage's death adheres to a Shakespearian tragic – or more accurately tragicomic – structure (Montgomery 1993). From Savage's own point of view, the situation is more classically tragic: in mistaking Lenina as "pure", he has ruined his own perceived purity. Savage dies after giving into his basest desires and the chants of onlookers. Instead of leading an individualistic revolution against false happiness, he leads a depraved and nihilistic orgy. The citizens of the World State, meanwhile, find themselves in a position of irony of which they are totally unaware: the visitor who claimed that "nothing costs enough here" has taken his own life, but even as his feet slowly rotate overhead "like two unhurried compass needles" (231) the question that is left hanging (pun unintended) is to what extent this death can be culturally assimilated in tragic terms by a society in which the tragic dramatic form has become unintelligible.

Even Helmholtz Watson, an intelligent and unorthodox Brave New Worlder, laughs despite himself at Juliet's unenviable situation in act three, scene five of *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Capulet and Lady Capulet try to persuade her to marry Paris: "the mother and father (grotesque obscenity) forcing the daughter to have some one she didn't want! And the idiotic girl not saying that she was having some one else whom (for the moment, at any rate) she preferred! In its smutty absurdity the situation was irresistibly comical" (168). The narrator's parentheses, focalised through Watson, demonstrate the breadth of the cultural gap between his intended 1930s readership and his vision of a future society in

which “need” is unknown. “To make a tragedy the artist must isolate a single element out of the totality of human experience and use that exclusively as his material”, Huxley (2001, 54) believed. Such elements would include familial and sexual jealousies, loyalties, and rivalries. It is the dubious accomplishment of the World State to have rendered this material unavailable. In a world full to overflowing with the irrelevant distractions of consumerism, the “distilled” and “chemically pure” tragic forms of art have, as Huxley (2001, 54) put it, lost their “power to act upon us quickly and intensely”. The characters are so wholly socialised that they are unable to imagine alternative social codes of behaviour.

While the multi-layered treatment of tragedy in *Brave New World* as a literary device serves a satirical purpose, it is also a means by which Huxley plays with more contemporary cultural anxieties: In July 1932, in a short article significantly on Zamyatin’s view of the future of Soviet theatre (which had appeared in *Le Mois*), Huxley (2001, 337) derided the fact that a “new Shakespeare” in Russia would have “no drama” to base a tragedy on, and would be reduced to “themes of farce and knockabout. Themes of pure fantasy and romance... Highly moral, tragic themes showing the sad fate which overtakes the individual if he fails to do his duty towards the state.” The narrative arc and tragic irony that prefigure catastrophes in the tragic form would thereby give way to the merely tragic themes of doomed dissent, serving only to re-inscribe the power of the current regime.<sup>9</sup>

Helmholtz Watson is a success model in World State terms. His “civilised” upbringing has entailed the ruthless social suppression of all emotional outlets where the tragic could be experienced. In a society “without need”, an act of self-sacrifice such as that of Shakespeare’s Juliet would be incomprehensible because, as Krishan Kumar (1987, 261) puts it, “tragedy needs suffering and social instability”.<sup>10</sup> Kumar sees Mustapha Mond as playing the role of the Grand Inquisitor from Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, but in Huxley’s World State good and evil have no Christian reference point meaning that the debate is in rather different terms. This highlights a profound problem in the intellectual and moral landscape of the novel, which Adorno (1967, 101) was quick to pick up on: in the World State, “what is, is right,” and as Mustapha Mond explains, “you can carry at least half your mortality about in a bottle” (213). For Adorno (1967, 107), the Christian metaphysics of Savage’s belief that salvation is possible only through suffering leads to suffering becoming “an absurd end in itself”. In answer to Mond’s admiration for the World State, John Savage can only offer myths of an English golden age that has never existed comprising the values of Shakespearean literature, suffering, Christian meaning and individualism.

This apparent endorsement of an absurd position is typical of Huxley’s work, particularly in the interwar era. Indeed, the one thing that the Savage’s wishful nostalgia shares with Huxley is that their political views are cherry-picked from a myriad of different and often contradictory positions. Huxley held, for instance, that “progress, objectively considered, is a reality”, because “human life is, on the average [sic], longer, healthier, safer, and more convenient than it

was" (2001, 339) and felt that the crises of the 1930s were "due, in the last resort, to the fact that science has been applied to human affairs, but not applied adequately or consistently" (2001, 148). However, in another essay from the same period on "The Outlook for American Culture" he asserted that, "all the resources of science are applied in order that imbecility may flourish and vulgarity cover the whole earth" (2001, 188). The application of science as the basis of the technologies providing "mass culture", as Huxley terms it, were driven by commercial pressure to supply only the "lowest" forms of entertainment, as "machinery makes culture possible but does not necessarily produce it among those who do not want to have it... machinery makes it possible for the capitalists who control it to impose whatever ideas and art forms they please on the mass of humanity" (2001, 190).

The "mass of humanity" are thus kept happy, but the pursuit of happiness is for Huxley not a suitable goal for civilization. He seems to be looking askance at America and even implicitly suggesting that the adoption into the US Declaration of Independence in 1776 of the "pursuit of happiness" as a natural right contains a specific economic imperative motivating production, which had led to the form in which the US entertainment industries were organised by the 1930s. There is "a correlation", he wrote in September 1931, "between the present popularity of the ideal of happiness and the rise of mass production. The pursuit of goodness, truth, and beauty sets no wheels turning, employs no labor. Whereas the ideal of happiness is a most valuable stimulus to production" (Huxley 2001, 294-95).

Huxley effectively argues that the political pursuit of happiness is inconsistent with the aesthetic aims of the European "high" culture tradition. To Adorno, Huxley was attempting to show that because the World State model of "subjective happiness" is worthless when assessed against "the criteria of traditional culture", then "happiness as such is worthless", and furthermore that,

A society which wants nothing but happiness, according to Huxley, moves inexorably into insanity, into mechanized bestiality. But Lenina's overzealous defensiveness betrays insecurity, the suspicion that her kind of happiness is distorted by contradictions, that it is not happiness even by its own definition... The holes in the vicious circles which Huxley draws with so much care are due not to inadequacies in his imaginative construction but to the conception of a happiness subjectively consummate but objectively absurd. If his critique of subjective happiness is valid, then his idea of a hypostatized objective happiness removed from the claims of humanity must be ideological. The source of untruth is the separation of subjective and objective, which has been reified to a rigid alternative.

(Adorno 1967, 111)

Despite Huxley adopting the stance of an "amused, Pyrrhonic aesthete" (6) who attempts to camouflage his ideological convictions, Adorno argues that he reveals his values by contrasting a happiness which can be bought and sold

in pills and tickets to the “feelies” with a rigid system of universalised aesthetic values symbolised (somewhat ironically) by hackneyed Shakespeare quotations which have been stripped of their social and historical context and rendered down into bite-size chunks.<sup>11</sup> If the dichotomy between an objectively meaningful culture and subjective happiness were real, how could Helmholtz find the Shakespeare which the Savage reads to him so satisfying and meaningful?

Adorno's central criticism of *Brave New World* is that it contributes to the very totality that (he believes) it seeks to negate. He sees Huxley's book as an *ideologically committed* work in the pejorative Marxist sense, one that not only offers a warning of the potential impact of the triumphs of science, technology and engineering on human life, but that also serves to reinforce the dominant capitalist ideology (which precludes any alternative). Adorno reads *Brave New World* as a “negative utopia” which fails because the cracks in characters' psychological health, as much as the static nature of the state, are overt (1967, 114). To the theorist of utopian longing, *Brave New World* demonstrates an eye for detail in observation of the twentieth-century capitalist totality, but its view of the future shatters utopian hope through its crude opposition of the “barbarism of happiness and culture as the objectively higher condition that entails unhappiness” (1967, 112; and see Ferns 1999, 124–25 & 247 n. 11.). This crude binary opposition is, to Adorno, an example of the very sort of categorising, systematising, instrumental rationality that characterised Enlightenment thought.

## Psychologies

The emotional illiteracy of the Brave New Worlders is testament to the success of their emotional and intellectual conditioning, which succeeds not in spite, but even because of their knowledge of the procedures such as hypnopædia to which they have been subjected. Only Helmholtz Watson, an intellectual giant who attempts to actively resist his conditioning, can *begin* to reflect upon his emotions. Watson gets into trouble when he produces “Rhymes in Moral Propaganda and Advertisement” – a crudely rhythmic lyric still bearing in the jolly bounce of the rhyme scheme the very conditioning that he seeks to escape. The lyric nevertheless strives for emotional engagement, and begins to structure his interior reflections into a poetic form (165–66). For the rest of the citizens of the World State, the emotional range is severely limited to narrow, moderate states of physical sensation which they rarely have the means to rationalise.

This non-cognitive experience of emotions suggests the influence of the psychologist William James, who argued that, “emotional brain-processes not only resemble the ordinary sensorial brain-processes but in very truth *are* nothing but such brain-processes variously combined” (W. James 1884, 188). In James's famous example, we do not see the bear, feel fear and run; we see the bear, tremble and consequently feel fear. He believed that the “cognitive”

perception of environmental phenomena is secondary to the bodily states of perception (1884, 190). Only after we tremble do we rationalise flight to be the best cause of action. In Huxley's fictional future society, intellectual passions, rationalised reactions and cognitive perceptions are almost entirely eliminated. In the early stages of writing, Huxley told his friend Sydney Schiff in a letter dated 7 May 1931 that his aim was to "make a comprehensible picture of the psychology based on quite different first principles from ours" (2007, 255). His success on this score was that in the revolutionised, libidinal economy of the novel, psychological conditioning limits emotional feeling to a narrow band of physical sensations.

The dissolution of the family is a key means by which this emotional restriction takes place. The World Controller describes the family as being full of "misery ... every kind of perversion ... madness and suicide" – in other words, the markers of tragedy. He also charges Freud with being "the first to reveal the[se] appalling dangers of family life", and insinuates that he advocated the dissolution of family structures (A. Huxley 2005, 44). It is therefore tempting to concur with Adorno that Huxley has a "complete misunderstanding" of Freud and treats the psychoanalyst "rather shabbily" (Adorno 1967, 104, 106). However, Huxley's reduction of Freud's whole body of work to an anti-familial, crude and permissive hedonism perhaps can be more productively viewed as a commentary on the processes of history.<sup>12</sup> As with Huxley's naming of his characters after an array of twentieth-century figures, it is not so much that he treats Freud shabbily, or misunderstands his work, but rather that history has a way of simplifying, altering, mythologising and misrepresenting historical figures. Moreover, Peter Firchow (1975, 313) finds evidence that Huxley's attack on Freud follows careful assessment, as under present conditions "[For Freud] the best man can hope for is to avoid unhappiness". Firchow quotes Freud as stating that "the most interesting" routes to this goal "are those which seek to influence our own organism [i.e., by chemical means]. In the last analysis, all suffering is nothing else than sensation; it only exists insofar as we feel it, and we only feel it in consequence of certain ways in which our organism is regulated". Firchow concludes that "here Freud comes very close to the mechanist position of someone like [John B.] Watson and even closer to the position of Mustapha Mond in *Brave New World*" (Firchow 1975, 313; quoting Freud 2001, 21:78).

To a vitalist and a self-confessed aesthete like Huxley, the idea that suffering is nothing but mechanically explicable physical sensations would be anathema. Huxley's aesthetic and moral positions rely heavily on the idea of *feeling* and any suggestion that the final end of psychological study will be to "free" mankind from the extremities of these human emotions would be profoundly disturbing to him. From his point of view, such a world would be one in which, as John Savage points out, "nothing costs enough" (214). Notwithstanding this, Freud is less of a straightforward mechanist than Firchow suggests here. Far from him *denying* the existence of feeling (as opposed to sensation) he asserts that, "it is not easy to deal scientifically with feelings.

One can attempt to describe their physiological signs. Where this is not possible... nothing remains but to fall back on the ideational content which is most readily associated with the feeling" (Freud 2001, 21:65).

For Freud, these physical symptoms are interesting not because they explain feelings, but because "a feeling can only be a source of energy if it is itself the expression of a strong need" (2001, 21:72). Hence, as Firchow rightly points out, Huxley's World State is a society which does not know feeling *because* it does not know need. But the overlap between the social problems elucidated in Freud's *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930) and the transformation of the psyche in *Brave New World* is not complete. Suffering, Freud contends, comes from three sources: "from our own body" in pain and anxiety, "from [forces in] the external world", and "from our relations with other men. The suffering which comes from this last source is perhaps more painful to us than any other" (Freud 2001, 21:77). While the first of these has been all but eliminated in Huxley's World State, and the second reduced to a minimum through conditioning, even their "neo-Pavlovian" and "hypnopaedic" methods cannot eliminate this final source.

Many of the characters' psyches therefore show dangerous signs of imminent breakdown or near collapse, and while the pleasure principle is no longer transformed into the "more modest reality principle" at every juncture (Freud 2001, 21:77), the most heavily indoctrinated Brave New Worlders do in fact still expend *more* energy on avoiding suffering than on obtaining pleasure. Huxley, as Firchow contends, uses Freud to "trace the consequences (as Huxley wrote to his father, of all people) 'of the abolition of the family and all the Freudian "complexes" for which family relationships are responsible'" (Firchow 1975, 312). But the presence of "soma holidays" seems to indicate that social suffering has not vanished: humanity still expresses a "need" to negate suffering through intoxication. Indeed, if this need is also an expression of the trophallactic social economy of ant-like citizens, then the World State relies in part upon this expending of energy to maintain social stability.

In the World State the question of happiness and suffering has undergone a seismic epistemological shift to make it a question for applied science rather than, say, art, ethics or philosophy. On this point, Freud's argument does indeed put him closer to the behaviorist psychologist John B. Watson than either of them would have liked to acknowledge. For Watson, Freudian psychology was a form of "introspective" psychology devoid of any merit since it did not approach the subject from a quantifiable, logico-experimental "scientific" angle. Reductively, Watson saw the physical symptoms of emotions, which James had taken to be only the primary, non-cognitive manifestation of emotions, to constitute emotions in their entirety. He was interested only in quantifiable behavioural responses to external stimuli, and therefore regarded consciousness as "neither a definite nor a useable concept" for the psychologist (Watson 1931, 2).

It is immediately apparent in Watson's work that the use of scientific discourse is as important to him as using the scientific method itself. Watson is

keen to appeal to businessmen as well as parents to promote a new way of life, a "scientific" route to well-being by producing identikit individuals moulded to neatly fit the roles to which society assigns them. He candidly points out that the primary use of his science is control: "it is the business of behavioristic psychology to be able to predict and to control human activity" (Watson 1931, 11). The political implications of the successful application of Watsonian behaviorism on a mass scale would be remarkable for authoritarian leaders. It is hardly surprising that Watson argues against free speech and the right of workers to unionise. A behaviorist science that was successful on its own terms would be an epoch-changing weapon for Stalinism, Fascism or Nazism.

Yet for behaviourism to succeed it must first prove its viability as a science. Watson's "scientific" rhetoric enabled him to shirk awkward questions about the scientific status of his work, which effectively reduced the complexity of a human being's psychological make-up to outwardly observable phenomena and then judged the success of attempted psychological conditioning purely on the narrow basis of the immediately observable changes affected. Resistance to the Watsonian psychologist is a symptom of illness, while a healthy individual is one who can be easily induced to do exactly as the psychologist desires. But this is also an exact definition of power – as Steven Lukes memorably put it, "*A* may exercise power over *B* by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants" (Lukes 1974, 23).<sup>13</sup> Watson's behaviorism is therefore nothing less than an attempt to make coercion into a science. At its apotheosis – and made all the more interesting by its ambiguous utopian longing – Watson argued that,

The universe will change if you bring up your children, not in the freedom of the libertine, but in behavioristic freedom – a freedom which we cannot even picture in words, so little do we know of it. Will not these children in turn, with their better ways of living and thinking, replace us as society and in turn bring up their children in a still more scientific way, until the world finally becomes a place fit for human habitation?

(1931, 303–4)

Watson's vision of a restrictive "freedom" is fundamental to the socio-political design of Huxley's World State, as underlined by the ironic naming of the character who resists this "freedom" Helmholtz Watson. The World State is one in which inhabitants have "been so conditioned that actions actually available to them [cannot] be perceived by them as options", and for this reason, John Gray argues, Isaiah Berlin's concept of "negative liberty", as "*choice among alternatives or options that is unimpeded by others*" cannot be applied to "the majority of the inhabitants" (Gray 1995, 15 emphasis in original).<sup>14</sup> In May 1930, Huxley declared that,



Circumstances are rendering it increasingly necessary for all States to guard against the dangers of insurgent individualism. Human standardisation will become a political necessity.

Psychologists having shown the enormous importance in every human existence of the first years of childhood, the State will obviously try to get hold of its victims as soon as possible.

(Bradshaw 1994, 49)

The brutal logic of attempting to get hold of “victims” as soon as possible would ultimately lead to the state seeking control from the very moment of conception itself. With Watsonian behaviourism and Wheeler’s conception of trophallaxis applied from the zygote stage onwards, the World Controllers ensure the reification of class relations and cater for the socio-economic needs of a static society. As Huxley would later put it in a preface for the novel, “a really efficient totalitarian state would be one in which the all-powerful executive of political bosses and their army of managers control a population of slaves who do not have to be coerced, because they love their servitude” (11). Huxley hereby anticipates Lukes’ (1974, 23) argument about the insidious nature of ideological power to ensure compliance without conflict.<sup>15</sup> The entire mechanism of the social production of human beings in the novel is geared to this purpose. Under capitalist production commodities (including, from a Marxian perspective, workers) are produced for profit rather than to satisfy social needs in the first instance. The hatcheries counteract this waste by creating people with no desires or needs beyond that which the state provides. In a cheerful, reductive comment that is surely laced with irony, the Director of the London Hatchery says, “that is the secret of happiness and virtue – liking what you’ve got to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their unescapable social destiny” (26).

### Vilfredo Pareto

The conditioning of behaviour to reduce awareness of choices is central to the control exerted by the World State over its citizens in *Brave New World*, and evocative of the work of Italian social theorist Vilfred Pareto, whose major four-volume work *Trattato di Sociologia Generale* (1916) was “something of a social theory bible to Huxley in the 1920s” (Murray 2003, 205).<sup>16</sup> According to Joseph Femia (2005, 4–5), Pareto insisted upon “the ethical primacy of the individual”, and believed that the modern liberal state had created a “religion” out of belief in “Progress”, and that society is “an inherently manipulative and exploitative system, sustained by varying combinations of deception and violence”. In sharp contrast to Marx’s oft quoted final thesis on Feuerbach, Pareto effectively argued that until now social scientists kept trying to change the world – the point is to understand it. In common with natural scientists, Pareto “ha[d] one single and exclusive aim in view: to be guided by the facts, and to discover the uniformities or ‘laws’ they present”

(Femia 2005, 15). A gifted mathematician, economist and former engineer with a grave mistrust of metaphysics, while Pareto understood the limitations of the scientific method for dealing with some social questions, he wanted to raise the analysis of society to scientific enquiry, to subject it to the “objective” standards of his logico-experimental method (Pareto 1897, 488–89, 491; Boldeman 2007, 216). To Pareto, humankind “is at the same time unreasonable and reasoning. Men rarely behave in a logical manner, but they always try to convince their fellows that they do” (Aron 1967, 2: 109). He believed humans are emotional and instinctive creatures, and consequentially beliefs and behaviour can be better ascribed to psychological and personal factors than to rational, utilitarian decision-making. In human history subjective desires frequently trump objective needs, and in this regard many human actions could best be described as “non-logical” (as opposed to *illogical*). As Raymond Aron (1967, 2:111) explains, to Pareto “for an action to be logical, the means–end relation in objective reality must correspond to the means–end relation in the mind of the actor”. A non-logical action, however, may consist of a means–end relation which is distinct in objective reality from the means–end relation in the mind of the actor. Hence, in *Brave New World* John Savage acts non-logically when he reproaches himself for having been persuaded by a shopkeeper to stock-up on tins of “pan-glandular biscuits and vitaminized beef-surrogate” in advance of retreating to the lighthouse in Surrey, and decides never to eat them, “even if he were starving. ‘That’ll teach them’ he thought vindictively”. Far from teaching “them” anything, in a society in which excessive consumption is encouraged, buying more than he will use is *objectively* of economic benefit to whomsoever “they” are.

By way of contrast, many of the practices of the State in *Brave New World* aimed at stability closely adhere to Paretian logic. The suppression of John Savage’s rebellion at the hospital by use of *soma* gas, for instance, functions as a quick and efficient means to the end of restoring order both in objective reality and in the policemen’s minds. Throughout *Brave New World* the influence of the *Trattato*’s key themes can be seen, including “the inevitability of elites, the predominance of irrational factors in human behaviour, the glorification of science and the denigration of metaphysics, the relativity and psychological roots of ideologies” (Femia 2005, 9). In his letters and essays, Huxley keenly endorsed much of what Pareto had to say and saw him as a scientist, a “prodigious debunker” and a “realist”, who avoided Germanic “gratuitous metaphysical entities” and was “perfectly aware of the limitations of the scientific method, yet perfectly aware of his rights” (A. Huxley 1969, 380). However, despite – or perhaps even because of – his own appreciation of Pareto’s ideas, he paradoxically treats the key themes of Pareto’s *Trattato* with Pyrrhic detachment and even amusement in *Brave New World*. Hence, while in an essay entitled “Pareto and Society” Huxley argued that in the West in the 1930s, “[s]keptical and humane cunning is no match for fanatical force”, (2001, 388) it is by cunning, conditioning and what might be termed the “soft violence” of policemen who carry *soma* gas that the order in *Brave*

*New World* is stabilised. The narrow, reductionist categorizing of human actions – ironically one of the weakest aspects of Pareto's theory – is satirically all that remains of the work that Huxley so admired.

To Adorno, the division between narrow categories of logical and non-logical action is precisely the sort of systemic, instrumental use of reason that he finds execrable in *Brave New World* – the placing of ideas as reified *things* into binary, antithetical categories when the ideas are not, in themselves, polar opposites. As already suggested however, Adorno's earnest critique does not engage with the satirical, Pyrrhonic side of the novel. When John Savage is brought before Mustapha Mond, for instance, he refers to the denouement of *King Lear* and asks the controller whether the “pleasant vices” of *Brave New World* degrade man. “Degrade him from what position?” Mond replies. “As a happy, hardworking goods-consuming citizen he's perfect. Of course, if you choose some other standard than ours, then perhaps you might say he was degraded. But you've got to stick to one set of postulates” (212).

In his analysis of *Brave New World*, Adorno took issue with this separation of postulates: “[i]n this image of the two sets of postulates, exhibited like finished products between which one must choose, relativism is apparent. The question of truth dissolves into an ‘if-then’ relation” (1967, 111). But Adorno quoted only the three sentences above, and not the sentence that followed: “You can't play Electro-magnetic Golf according to the rules of Centrifugal Bumble-puppy.” The self-satirizing tone of Mond's argument was therefore lost. Also lost was Pareto as the target of the satire, which the gentle reference to non-logical rules seems to imply. Truth has indeed become a relative and *non-scientific*, non-empirical, normative value. Yet this has happened as a result of Mond's enforcement of narrow categories of logic. As the trivialising final sentence implies, argument according to such categorisation will only get so far in analysing human behaviour in *King Lear*.

### The “black amalgam”

Despite using Shakespeare as the marker for “high culture”, as a novel of ideas Huxley's dystopia was hotly topical. In it, Huxley tested his satirical and critical capabilities within a generic mode that allowed him to range across a host of contemporary anxieties. Raymond Williams, placing *Brave New World* in the context of two other dystopias (Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) argued that the novel

Projects a black amalgam of Wellsian rationality and the names and phrases of revolutionary socialism, in a specific context of mobile and affluent corporate capitalism. This sounds and is confused, but... it is the authentic confusion of two generations of science fiction itself, in its dystopian mode.

(R. Williams 1979, 60)

The “authentic confusion” of *Brave New World* is an expression of the material reality from which it arose, the imperfect synthesis of trophallactic social economy, behavioural engineering, genetic manipulation, American consumerism, Paretian (non-)logical action, scientism, warmongering and a confusion of competing political systems. The true significance of *Brave New World* lies in Huxley's use of formal and particularly thematic experimentation to explore an array of social, political and cultural concerns. By continually flitting between linguistic registers from Shakespeare to cinema, science to sex and conversation to free indirect discourse, Aldous Huxley often smuggles a sustained critique in beneath the veneer of carefree satire. In short, while interested in comedic value he is a more serious thinker than his self-evaluation as an “amused Pyrrhonic aesthete” implies. Hence, while Adorno convincingly undermines Huxley's opposition of culture and happiness, *Brave New World* remains valuable precisely because it was constituted in the particular historical circumstances that it reflects, and (as highlighted in the introduction) as such was also an active participant in the production of the political discourse of its day (see Adams 2016, 3). In focusing on utopian ideas, Adorno neglects the specific psychological and scientific themes that Huxley tackles. Huxley might well be impinged on all sides by the forces he seeks to criticise, but eloquently and with humour he elucidates the complex constellation of social fears and anxieties prevalent in his epoch.

In *Brave New World*, Huxley continually foregrounds affluent consumerism, promiscuous sexuality and the narcotic *soma*; a banal and dull existence of over-stimulated sensory gratification. It is characteristic of the dystopian mode as both politically engaged and satirical that Huxley is able to use a fictional society supposedly distinguished by its intellectual vacuum to explore the great intellectual debates of his age. The sex, drugs and affluence of the World State mask the soft brutality of the World State, but the real significance of the novel to the development of the dystopian genre lies in the novel's exploration of cultural anxieties. As we shall see in chapter four, the dystopian allegories of Storm Jameson and Rex Warner respond to the threat that came to dominate the years succeeding the publication of *Brave New World* not with amused detachment but with a political commitment to combating the threat of an expansive Nazism.

## Notes

- 1 All subsequent references to *Brave New World* are to the 2005 Harper Perennial edition, which includes his 1946 preface (5–13) and the extended 1958 essay *Brave New World Revisited* (233–340), and which will appear in the text with only the relevant page reference cited.
- 2 For structural analysis of this section see Stock (2016).
- 3 Revealingly this is the only time anyone expresses money worries in the novel.
- 4 See, for example *The Times* 27 February 1931, 14 (“New Moscow Trial: Socialist Experts Indicted”) or the editorial of 8 July 1931, 15 (“Regimenting Russia”).

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- 5 See also his essay "A Soviet Schoolbook": "[C]ommunism is the religion of this world; its heaven is here and, in future time, its High God in Proletarian Society. It has its dogmatic theology – a fine old-fashioned nineteenth-century materialism. It can boast its inquisitors at home, its persecuted martyrs abroad. It has its ceremonial rites" (A. Huxley 2001, 309).
- 6 This is nowhere clearer than in *Point Counter Point*: "they all want to land us in hell. All, without exception. Lenin and Mussolini, Macdonald and Baldwin. All equally anxious to take us to hell and only squabbling about the means of taking us" (A. Huxley 1928, 415 emphasis in original).
- 7 For a more direct discussion of the influence of Haldane, Russell and Huxley's brother Julian on *Brave New World* that is sensitive to the importance of literary form, see Firchow (1975).
- 8 "Infantile" and "infantility" are words which Huxley puts into the mouths of Bernard Marx (93), the Director of the Hatchery (96) and Mustapha Mond (200) to signify that Brave New Worlders are emotionally and intellectually undeveloped in their wants and needs.
- 9 On theatre as "the most perfect artistic form of coercion", see Boal (1979, 39). Zamyatin and his wife separately reported Huxley had claimed in 1932 not to have read *We*. In 1962 Huxley stated he had not even heard of the novel until the late 1950s. See Shane (1968, 140 n. 2).
- 10 By way of contrast, John's upbringing takes place in a family environment. His relationship with his mother (who blames him, in place of his father, for her misfortune) together with the stilted parody of John's Oedipal relationship with his mother's lover Popé serves as the ample basis for an appreciation of tragedy.
- 11 Laura Frost (2006, 456) additionally notes that "Shakespeare's work has been severed from its theatricality, as Huxley figures it not in its enacted form but in the more threatening private experience of reading."
- 12 Grover Smith's collection *Letters of Aldous Huxley* (A. Huxley 1969) indexes some fifteen letters concerned – at least in part – with Freud or "Freudism" [sic]. While Huxley was very interested in psychology, particularly after his interest in mysticism was aroused in 1936, he was usually fairly scathing of Freudian psychoanalysis in his correspondence. See also the satire of Freudian dream analysis in Huxley's first novel, *Crome Yellow* (1921, 65–66).
- 13 Lukes then immediately comments, "one does not have to go to the lengths of talking about *Brave New World*, or the world of B.F. Skinner to see this: thought control takes many less total and more mundane forms".
- 14 Gray's reading is contentious here as Berlin's definition of liberty does not require an individual to have perfect knowledge of options or presuppose the existence of a single rational choice – indeed, he argues that any "rationalist" design to force people to use their reason "correctly" is "to deny their human essence" (Berlin 1958, 34–37, 22).
- 15 Compare with Rousseau's (2003, 3) dictum that "nothing can be more certain than that every man born in slavery is born for slavery. Slaves lose everything in their chains, even the desire of escaping from them: they love their servitude, as the comrades of Ulysses loved their brutish condition". Rousseau is alluded to directly in *Brave New World* through reference to a half-remembered former acquaintance of Lenina's called "Jean-Jacques Habibullah" (87).
- 16 Huxley offered T. S. Eliot to comment on sample pages of the English manuscript, which had been translated by Arthur Livingston and was published as *The Mind and Society* in 1935. He also agreed in principle to write an introduction for the translation "because I like and admire the book so much" (A. Huxley 1969, 379–80). He later reviewed the translation as "Pareto's Museum of Human Stupidity", in *New York Herald Tribune Books* (9 June 1935) and wrote the article "Pareto and Society" in *Time and Tide* (10 March 1934), reprinted in Huxley (2001, 386–88).

## 4 “It has happened to Europe before but never to me”

### Allegory and English exceptionalism in 1930s dystopias

#### Introduction: transition and commitment

The 1930s is commonly held to be marked by the trend away from modernist experimentation with form and toward didactic realism and politically committed art in British literature. Reflecting on the period in her autobiography *Journey From the North* (1969), Margaret Storm Jameson summarises the feeling of transition she felt at the time:

The twenties, for all their disorder, were lively with ideas, dreams, hopes, experiments. The illusion of freedom was intoxicating... But a moment did come – roughly at the end of the feverishly energetic twenties – when the moral and intellectual climate changed. Almost before they knew what was happening to them, writers found themselves being summoned on to platforms and into committee-rooms to defend society against its enemies.  
(S. Jameson 1984, 1: 292)

The shift in atmosphere accelerated after Hitler's election to Chancellor in 1933. Indeed, notwithstanding the strong influence that Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) has asserted over the dystopian genre since its publication, in some respects Huxley's novel fits more easily as a companion to Zamyatin's *We* in the stable of 1920s experimental and satirical writing than alongside the more earnest and pointedly allegorical dystopian texts which were more common in the 1930s.

The targets of Huxley's and Zamyatin's satire are multiple and correspond to the varied “ideas, dreams, hopes, experiments” of their day. By way of contrast, Jameson's future-set allegory *In the Second Year* (1936) takes as its main narrative impetus a single empirical correspondence and unfolds this across three months of story time. According to Stan Smith's introduction (in S. Jameson 2004, xi) to the novel, it “deliberately shadows, date for date,” events in the second year of Hitler's reign, leading up to the purge known as the “Night of the Long Knives”. Yet Smith also notes that alongside, “some precise homologies between the events of the novel and those of Germany in 1934”, there are “also significant divergences of detail” (S. Jameson 2004, xii),

and the allegorical content of the novel also takes in the fall of the Labour government of 1929–1931.

I begin this chapter with an exploration of allegory and “allegorical criticism”, in order to demonstrate the importance of both to the study of dystopian fictions as narratives of world politics. Locating the turn to future-set allegory in the development of the dystopian genre as a series of politically committed responses to the crises of the 1930s enables us to unpick how these texts interweave political discourse and historical analysis. While these texts offer important critiques of fascism, I suggest an approach which moves beyond the rigid opposition of symbol and allegory can expose the reliance on myths of nature and nation in these texts which limit their impact.

Discussion of primary texts begins with the political ambiguities of Rex Warner’s first novel *The Wild Goose Chase* (published 1937 but largely completed by 1932). The book makes extensive use of stylistic devices drawn from the satirical and allegorical tradition of Bunyan, Fielding and Swift. As N.H. Reeve (1989, 22) argues, the novel mirrors the “Protestant quest-narrative, where doubt journeys towards faith”. It delights in inventive language, and seems to demand allegorical interpretation, but at crucial junctures the specific historical analogies are difficult to place. I argue that the book can be read as an exercise in moral and political allegory rather than historical allegory, which places it apart from the other allegories – and indeed dystopian fictions – examined here. The lack of historical specificity at times makes for an absurdism whose logic is difficult to penetrate, and this led some postwar critics to read Warner as the English answer to Franz Kafka (see Rajan and Pearse 1945). Since then critics have rejected such comparisons as “superficial” because Warner is “quite removed from Kafka in purpose as well as theme” (Devitis 1960, 116).

Unlike *The Wild Goose Chase*, Margaret Storm Jameson’s 1936 *In the Second Year* to which I next turn is built around immediate and specific points of allegorical correspondence. The book is structured around political dialogues between multiple characters. While maintaining a balance of competing voices, the novel is a document of forceful political rhetoric in which Storm Jameson offers a withering critique of liberal humanism through the shortcomings of narrator Andy Hillier. The novel is also notable for what Jameson’s biographer Jennifer Birkett (2009, 6) terms the “intimate connection of landscape and identity” which is a hallmark of “Jameson’s cultural vision”.

If *The Wild Goose Chase* forestalls allegorical reading through its intoxicating absurdism, this cannot be said of Warner’s 1938 novel *The Professor*, which soberly tells the story of a liberal professor asked to take over a country in crisis and who is ultimately betrayed for sticking to the liberal principles which put him there in the first place. To further substantiate the issue of allegory, I read the novel as polemically addressing the inadequacies of liberal humanism to respond to the threat of fascism in the inter-war era.

My concern with these texts is twofold: firstly show how allegory and myth are put to service in the development of the dystopian genre; and secondly to

discuss how writers on the independent left responded to the threat of fascism in the 1930s through their politically committed works, which have wider uses for how we conceive of narrative fiction as contributing to political debate on international politics. Building on this work on myth and allegory, in the next chapter I engage in close reading of Katherine Burdekin's fantastic dystopian fiction. Like Jameson and Warner, Burdekin's work has important relationships to the pastoral, the allegoric and the mythical.

### Allegory and allegoresis

It is tempting to read the renewed emphasis upon an allegorical mode in novels like Storm Jameson's *In the Second Year* and Rex Warner's *The Professor* as part of a wider aesthetic shift away from the emphasis upon symbol in the high modernism of Virginia Woolf, H. D. [Hilda Doolittle], or Katherine Mansfield. In this suspiciously tidy periodisation, such allegories might be read as responding to specific contemporary events through a simple displacement in time and/or location, without the perceived "difficulty" of the multi-faceted symbol typical of 1920s modernist literature. Indeed, in D. H. Lawrence's final major essay *Apocalypse* (1930), he dismisses the (Christian) allegorical tradition as too simple for himself even as a child:

When as a boy I learnt from Euclid that: 'The whole is greater than the part', I immediately knew that that solved the problem of allegory for me. A man is more than a Christian, a rider on a white horse must be more than mere Faithfulness and Truth, and when people are merely personifications of qualities they cease to be people for me.

(Lawrence 1995, 61)

From this perspective, the return to the simplicity of political allegory in the years immediately following Lawrence's death in 1930 could be seen as an explicit reaction against 1920s modernism by embracing that which modernism rejected.<sup>1</sup> But Lawrence's argument rests on a slippage between (fictional) "character" and (real) "people" which is especially problematic in the context of the discussion of symbol. Moreover, in the wider literary sphere modernist writing continued apace in the 1930s. This periodising furthermore fails to do justice to the complexity of 1930s dystopian allegories, and while in dystopian genre writing the emphasis upon allegorical content undeniably marks a shift, symbol remains an important component, particularly with regards to the treatment of landscape. Indeed, the treatment of landscape in some 1930s dystopias is not so different in type to the modernism of Lawrence, Hemingway and especially Wyndham Lewis, whose 1928 allegory *The Childermass* Fredric Jameson (1979, 6) describes as the "veritable summa of Lewis' narrative modernism".

The relationship between symbol and allegory is a complicated one then, and as Gail Day (1999) points out it would be a mistake to hypostatise the two



against each other. That allegory and symbol have often been read as an unequal dichotomy is in part the result of the discussion surrounding two foundational texts in the study of allegory by Paul de Man and Walter Benjamin respectively, both of whom, “characterize the symbol as immediacy, presence, identity, and transcendence... [and] emphasize allegory’s qualities of nonidentity, rupture, disjunction, distance, and fragmentation” (Day 1999, 106). Yet as Day also notes, “Benjamin suggests that both symbol and allegory became debased concepts in the hands of those who had sought to elevate the former over the latter” (1999, 108). This should caution us that the relationship between modernism, symbol, dystopia and allegory is nuanced and complex, and cannot be easily divided by a line that sets the first two as a pair against the second two in a matrix formation. To take a modernist example, in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Molly Bloom’s narration of the novel’s final episode (“Penelope”), with its references to her youth on Gibraltar, clearly functions as criticism of British colonial rule (see Gibson 2002, 252–72 *passim*). But if this has what Day terms above the “distance and fragmentation” of allegory, then the narration of the chapter by a fully embodied thinking subject whose thinking and feeling are combined in one beautifully expressed stream-of-consciousness also has the presence and immediacy of symbol.

If both Benjamin and de Man begin “from a critique of the romantic affection for ‘the symbol’” (Bové 2010, 77), then in doing so they do not simply want to rescue allegory by attaching it to anti-romantic modernists. As Reeve summarises, in “The Rhetoric of Temporality” (1969) Paul de Man reads the romantic privileging of symbol above allegory as “part of a deluded effort to bridge the gap between self and other”, whereas in his work *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Walter Benjamin “emphasise[s] the ‘decisive category of time’, which constituted its difference from the transcendent world of symbolism; in allegory, meaning is involved in history and reveals itself to patient contemplation rather than through spectacular intimations” (Reeve 1989, 26). It is pertinent to note, however, that Benjamin’s object of analysis is, as his title suggests, German *Trauerspiel*. If, as he famously puts it, “allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things”, this should not be ripped from the context of the historical analysis too hastily, in which he is seeking to explain “the baroque cult of the ruin” (Benjamin 1998, 178).

Benjamin sees his task as a historical one focused on a particular form and period. His positive conception of allegory in relation to history responds in the first instance to what he sees as Goethe’s ahistorical and “negative, *a posteriori* construction of allegory”, in which allegory arises from the poet looking for the particular in the general (the “true nature” of poetry, Goethe believed, lay in “the expression of the particular without any thought of, or reference to, the general” (quoted in Benjamin 1998, 161)). Benjamin is seeking instead to embed allegory within semiotics, as to him it is “not a playful technique, but a form of expression, just as speech is expression and, indeed, just as writing is” (1998, 162). Allegory therefore becomes a key mode in a world of signs as an object of knowledge which, “is not securely

possessed until it becomes a fixed schema: at one and the same time a fixed image and a fixing sign" (1998, 184).

Notwithstanding the context of Benjamin's discussion of the Baroque, this can – and has – been taken as a more general statement that, in Gerald L. Bruns's (1988, 388) words, "allegory is about the power of signification, its ability to generate its own justification from within itself". Benjamin points us to the fact that the signifying power of allegory is not only aesthetic but also political, as a means of expressing what is not or cannot be directly said. Allegory demands the reader jump across a gap (in dystopian fiction usually – though by no means always – temporal) in order to read a set of characters in a (fictional) situation as shedding light on the actions of historical subjects in empirical reality. There is a key lesson in politics here: convince someone to discuss a political issue through your allegory and they are already approaching it on terms you dictate.

From the 1970s, an important distinction was raised in the study of allegory between the allegory *as such* and allegorical interpretation of texts. This turn effectively made the question of reading allegory into one of hermeneutics. As Maureen Quilligan (1979, 24) notes, "allegory appeals to readers as readers of a system of signs, but this may be only to say that allegory appeals to readers in terms of their most distinguishing human characteristic, as readers of, and therefore as creatures finally shaped by, their language". Quilligan also makes the plea for a distinction between allegory as a generic literary form and the hermeneutic practice of allegoric interpretation, or *allegoresis*. Bruns (1988, 390) surmises that for Quilligan, "all allegories are about the making of allegories and, more generally, about language". Allegoresis may effectively allow for the interpretation of any (non-allegorical) text as being about these concerns too.

Criticising all literary criticism that drew on non-literary sources such as philology, Northrop Frye (2000, 89) once commented that "all interpretation is essentially allegorical". Drawing on Frye, Quilligan notes that all of our critical interpretations "allegorise" their literary objects, "by making our own running commentary as we read" (1979, 16). In *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Fredric Jameson's methodology is unabashedly allegorical. Eschewing Quilligan's argument, Jameson precedes to turn on its head Frye's opposition to allegorical criticism. He thus declares: "interpretation is here construed as an essentially allegorical act, which consists in rewriting a given text in terms of a particular interpretive master code" due to the fact that "texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or – if the text is brand new – through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive traditions" (F. Jameson 2002, ix–x). As Bruns (1988, 388) puts it, "to interpret anything – to make sense of it – is simply to find a state of affairs in which it fits", and we draw on our repositories of knowledge and experience in order to do so. But this desire to fit new interpretations into our existing conceptual horizons also contributes to the situation in which interpretations

always remain unstable. Whether their object is a simple metaphor or a complex extended allegory, Bruns (1988, 387) remarks that, “the text that allegorises always remains excessive and uncontainable with respect to the structures that try to claim it”. In other words, there is a limit to the precision with which we can employ correspondences: both the allegorical act of interpretation *and* the allegory itself are always-already imperfect.

For Jameson, the excessive and uncontainable elements of texts that reveal the limits of interpretative structures point to inherent and unresolvable contradictions, which the critic must try to grasp. Such acts may then reveal a potential utopian surplus, and it is here that Jameson is able to move beyond the individual literary text toward broader critique of the ideological superstructure. As he observes:

Ideology is not something which informs or invests symbolic production; rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal ‘solutions’ to unresolvable social contradictions.

(F. Jameson 2002, 64)

Allegory is a mode that seeks estrangement from the conditions of its production (Jameson borrows Claude Levi-Strauss’s term to name allegory a type of “political *pensée sauvage*”), but in releasing “a sometimes repressed ur-narrative or master fantasy about the interaction of collective subjects” we can grasp “individual texts... as ‘utterances’ in an essentially collective or class discourse”. Central to the job of the critic, then, is to “articulate a text’s fundamental contradiction” (F. Jameson 2002, 66). Jameson thereby raises the stakes of interpretation beyond the individual text or even the genre to a method by which to comprehend the contradictions of late capitalism. What begins with allegory quickly extends beyond literature to cover an entire politics.

### **The senses of a meaning**

The importance to dystopian fiction of these debates over allegory as a mode of political critique can be drawn out with reference to Quentin Skinner’s (2002) discussion of the term “meaning” in the first volume of his *Visions of Politics*. For Skinner, critics have employed the term “meaning” in at least three analytically separable ways (often the same critic engages more than one of them). “Meaning<sub>1</sub>”, is “equivalent to asking: what do the words mean, or what do certain specific words or sentences mean, in a given text?” Skinner cites as examples proponents of the New Criticism Wimsatt and Beardsley, who emphasised the importance in reading a poem of “the meaning of the words in front of us, not the supposed intentions of those who originally wrote them”, as well as Derrida’s use of the term when he talks about “the

irrecoverability of meaning” – i.e. that the meaning of words cannot be irrevocably fixed (Skinner 2002, 1:91).

“Meaning<sub>2</sub>” is about the reader’s interpretation (in Skinner’s (2002, 1:92) words, “what does this text mean to me?”). Such a use is in play with the reader-response criticism of Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish and, we may add in the context of Utopian Studies, Kenneth Roemer. This use of the word “meaning” is also “the sense that exponents of the New Criticism usually seem to have in mind when they speak about ‘structures of effects’ and the need to concentrate on assessing their impact on the reader”. It includes moreover Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, which concentrate on “changing public meanings of texts, rather than on the meanings that their original authors may have intended” (Skinner 2002, 1:92). Finally, “Meaning<sub>3</sub>” addresses intentionality with the question “what does a writer mean by what he or she says in a given text?” (Skinner 2002, 1:93)

The problem with this typology of “meanings” is that it is far from ideologically neutral: any attempt to locate a text’s “meaning” in terms of dominant structures of inequality is soon reduced to narrowly individualistic identity politics, in the terms of the second question “what does this text mean to me?” The tripartite structure of these “meanings” is itself already ideological; the prism through which the whole interpretative schema is produced has its own political “meaning”. I therefore propose an explicitly political fourth dimension or “meaning<sub>4</sub>” the sense of which would be, “what does this text mean as an ideological act?” In Roger Pooley’s (2010, 82) words, “allegory, whether engaged in as reading or writing, is about making meaning – a meaning which is ideological, ethical or theological”. For dystopian fiction, such meaning is especially important.

As future-set fiction concerned with history and future-history alike, I want to suggest that in dystopias allegory cuts across Skinner’s different senses of “meaning”. The “surface” words-on-the-page meaning of the (future-set) dystopian narrative is an example of “Meaning<sub>1</sub>”; the “sign” or correspondence to which as allegory it directly alludes is “Meaning<sub>3</sub>”; and the political effect of such systems upon the reader is “Meaning<sub>2</sub>”. But to fully grasp such texts as ideological utterances which point to wider contradictions (“meaning<sub>4</sub>”) we must also see how they fit into broader generic developments. Dystopian fiction imagines the radical alterity of what Jonathan Swift’s houyhnhnms in *Gulliver’s Travels* (who cannot separate lies from the imaginative acts of fiction) call “the thing which is not”. Such fiction does so with the implicit warning that “the thing which is not” very well *might be* by placing this imaginary in a future made both immediate and distant, fractured by what I have previously termed the future-as-past (Stock 2016) yet (imaginatively) contiguous with the present. At times cognate with modernism (as with Huxley’s *Brave New World*) and at times in dynamic tension with it (as with Storm Jameson’s *In the Second Year*), the dystopian genre of the first half of the twentieth century charts an uneven and at times unpredictable course back and forth between symbol and allegory.

Rex Warner, for whom allegory is a method defined simply as “other-speaking” (1946, 105) argues that,

Possibly a convenient distinction may be made between allegory and symbolism, but even this is difficult, since the two so often merge into each other. Indeed, in our common use of the words we seem to mean by a ‘symbol’ merely a shortened or isolated allegory, and by an ‘allegory’ merely a sustained use of symbols which are connected together either in narrative or in description.

(Warner 1946, 108)<sup>2</sup>

Defending his own use of allegory, Warner challenges the dichotomy between allegory and symbol by effectively collapsing the distinction between the two. This seems to somewhat over-simplify the relationship between them. However, Warner also describes a range running from the “obvious allegory of Bunyan... to the much vaguer and indeed obscure allegory of Herman Melville or Dostoevsky or Kafka” (1946, 109). For Warner, “today more than ever it seems desirable to imagine and somehow embody those forces in consciousness which are not immediately evident to ordinary observation, to find new relations among them or illustrate old ones” (1946, 116). In some of the most sophisticated and accomplished dystopian novels of the 1930s such as Katharine Burdekin’s *Swastika Night* (1937), prescient allegorical warning is deftly handled while a controlled symbolic schema opens the novel to multiple readings. Even Warner’s *The Wild Goose Chase*, “a quest-allegory with Marxist revolution as the goal in view, still continues on occasions to draw on that romantic-symbolist legacy, to which the simplifying functions of allegorical techniques are anathema” (Reeve 1989, 22).

For all of their engagement with the dangers of European politics in the 1930s, one of the ways in which the importance of allegory is pressed home in the texts I examine here is via frequent assertions that England and the English<sup>3</sup> are in some indefinable way different to the continent (*plus ça change...*). I argue that part of the satirical force of the dystopias which I study in this and the following chapter comes from their perpetuation and re-inscription of national myths, especially mythical beliefs in England as a “natural” home of liberty. Even as Mosley’s all-too-English Blackshirts, guarded by police, tried to march through the East End and were stopped by local Jewish and gentile members of the working class, English writers on the independent left such as Jameson, Rex Warner and even Katharine Burdekin felt that something in the “English character” was naturally repelled by the prospect of dictatorship in the country, whether fascist or communist. More accurately, perhaps, the thought that England could so easily become home to a dictatorship appalled them so much that they turn to nationalist rhetoric to show how unnatural and unpatriotic – in the sense of alien to English “tradition” – are such images of the country.

## The Wild Goose Chase

Warner's first novel was largely finished five years before its publication in 1937 (Tabachnick 2002, 80) and as such its cruel atmosphere is eerily prescient. *The Wild Goose Chase* tells the story of three brothers who set out from an unnamed frontier town to seek the wild goose. As one might expect from the title, the plot twists and turns across a seemingly endless landscape, with the eponymous geese often dropping out of sight as the object of chase. The novel follows the youngest brother, George, as he learns about the subjugation of the countryside peasantry, travels to the capital city – where he narrowly escapes the sadistic cruelty of government scientists and compulsively laughing policemen – and then returns to the countryside via an autocratic breakaway republic which champions democracy. The geese finally appear after George leads the countryside peasants and industrial workers in revolutionary uprising against the town. Despite the revolutionary trajectory of the plot, the different paths that the three brothers take towards political enlightenment through varied adventures dominate over descriptions of social conditions in town and countryside alike. It is in this respect that the novel conforms most closely to the Puritan allegoric tradition of Bunyan, as N. H. Reeve (1989, 2) points out.

The allegorical content in the opening pages seems straightforward: the dashing eldest brother Rudolph sets out a hero on a beautiful motorbike; David, the intellectual middle child with a cruel streak of indifference sets out on a new bicycle; and the youngest, George, a dreamer and birdwatcher whose rusty bicycle fails him almost immediately, has to travel on foot. While it is clear that the reader is supposed to identify with George, there is nevertheless a certain off-putting ambiguity in his high-handed treatment of the crowds of well-wishers; ordinary people for whom he does not (as yet) care.

From the start the third-person narrator clearly aligns with the viewpoint of George, albeit with an ironic distance that still allows for the protagonist to be surprising. We never learn why the Prebendary's wife kisses George full on the lips as he is leaving, nor why George's last act in the town is to strike the Prebendary in the face, but the terms in which it is described suggest that it is an act of restorative justice, setting George up as a moral arbiter despite his evident arrogance. Reeve explains the narrator's uncritical enthusiasm for the main character thus: "the narrator... is a representative of what [Ezra] Pound in 1933 called the mortmain, the timorous and directionless post-World War I society, in need of renewal but uncertain of both means and ends" (Reeve 1989, 30). George is frequently questioned, led astray and criticised by other characters throughout the quest that ensues, but his motivations are never called into question by the narrative voice. This aligns with the Protestant allegorical tradition. What the reader is invited to share, in effect, is the narrative viewpoint of an upper-middle-class man learning to identify with the interests of the working class.

Given this strong sense of identification what is surprising about *The Wild Goose Chase* is just how politically ambiguous it is, often inviting interpretation only to resist any clear allegoric correspondence or moral lesson. This ambiguity is apparent even from the novel's epigraph from Ephesians 6:12, which reads "For our contention is not with the blood and the flesh, but with dominion, with authority, with the blind world rulers of this life, with the spirit of evil in things heavenly." If this is the allegorical lesson, then the novel demands to be interpreted not as an attack on contemporary political forces of reaction such as fascism, but rather as against a more nebulous spiritual evil. Ephesians chapter six defends the earthly status quo – even enjoining slaves to serve their masters as they would Christ. But the battle toward which the plot builds in which the peasantry and the workers triumph over the ruling elite is a battle to be free from earthly bondage.

The novel's political ambiguity can be further seen in its attitude towards colonialism. On the one hand, those who live in the countryside are clearly described by the revolutionary peasant Pushkov as the victims of colonisation from the town: "We received the benefits which had been promised us. No sooner had the first townsmen established themselves in the country than they sent for what we might have expected, their guns, their police, and their priests" (Warner 1945b, 115). On the other hand, the organisation and leadership of the peasants themselves is insufficient and it requires George as the heroic bourgeois outsider to be accepted as leader for the revolutionary party to amass the discipline, courage and energy needed to overcome the city and achieve freedom. As Reeve notes, George continues to remain "disengaged and pragmatic", with his ultimate goal always in mind (1989, 39). Among his first acts when victory is achieved is to proclaim that the country will no longer hinder adventurers and travellers such as himself from traipsing around as they please on their thoroughly bourgeois ornithological travels. George wants to have his cake and eat it: to be accepted as a political leader of the working class while maintaining many of the privileges of the bourgeois liberal humanist.

To square this circle, Warner links the question of communist revolution to spiritual concerns. Hence, when George is initiated into the peasants' communist resistance movement he learns that the opposition between town and country is not just political but also metaphysical. In answer to his questions about why time and space function in such an esoteric and subjective manner in the countryside, he is told that,

We live here by the sun and the seasons, and walk from house to causeway or barn... you don't notice that our times and spaces are calculated in a different manner from any which you know. With us space is a matter of direction. In some directions the going is good, in others more difficult. It is 30,000 miles from here to your town, if, that is, you are going backwards; but you got here quite easily.

Time too, depends on the person. We simple farmers see the sun and follow him, but in the town the sun matters very little. It is only the wireless authorities and those responsible for the food supply who pay attention to our day.

(Warner 1945b, 110–11)

Characters each experience the passage and direction of space and time differently: George learns “that when the direction is ill-defined there can be immense speed of transit from one irrelevant point to another” (Warner 1945b, 146) and he will have to pass many such points before he completes his quest. The countryside folk live by a tactile, seasonal schedule in which they *feel* the passage of time according to their motion through life. They effectively live outside of the currents of history, under a set of complex arrangements of indentured labour to the town. But far from allowing the countryside to set its own self-governing standards of time, another of George’s impositions as post-revolutionary leader is to declare the standardisation of time and space throughout the country. He evidently sees this not as a means of regulating the labour of the countryside folk but rather as a means for freedom: the countryside and its way of life shall endure, but only through entry and participation in History.

The end of the subjective relativity of time and move towards standardised time in the countryside from this standpoint can be seen as a retreat from post-Einstein relativity towards the Newtonian certainties of previous centuries. Warner thereby enters a more confusing (and confused) realm, in which Revolution is not so much a step along the deterministic Soviet interpretation of Marxism, but simply a pre-condition for the continued existence of bourgeois liberal humanist values. Significantly in this regard, the cure that George prescribes for bourgeois intellectuals such as his brother David who have difficulty adapting to the new order is fresh country air. David’s work for the Revolution is not to be in a factory, but in the collection of flowers: a return, in other words, to the cultural interests of the romantics. Despite the frequent modernistic experiments with language, time and space, the city’s bourgeois culture is derided precisely because of its cosmopolitan formation and abstract obsessions.

The narrative is in this regard a little disingenuous: although the initial revolutionary motivation of the working class of countryside and town alike is their material conditions, the confrontation between proletariat and bourgeoisie is also depicted as a battle between the productive force of mass labour as creators of use value and the decadent aestheticism of bourgeois cultural production. Yet when the character Marqueta offers a defence of bourgeois culture as art (and art criticism) for its own sake, George responds that, “words are dug from mines and grow in fields” (Warner 1945b, 403). The Convent’s obsessive study of purely academic subjects removed from everyday experience is likewise implied to be of no value to the wider community. Warner effectively argues that in the 1930s there is a moral and



aesthetic imperative for art to be politically committed and for science to be of practical import in improving the lot of humankind rather than merely theoretical or experimental.

At the same time, however, criticism of the town's culture masks a different type of cultural elitism: the factory workers who come out in favour of the Revolution are never really given a voice of their own (except insofar as one or two of the peasants are former town residents) and we learn nothing of their cultural forms or way of life. Instead, the hierarchical relations of the city are fleshed out through encounters with its largely obstructive, decadent and arrogant bourgeois inhabitants whose lives are devoted to a specifically modern idea of leisure, for which the architecture is specially adapted: "The houses were mostly of two or three stories, and on their flat roofs were laid out tennis courts, motor bicycle tracks, and artificial shrubberies" (Warner 1945b, 166). Like Huxley before him, Warner targets cultural aspirations of the new suburban middle class.

It is clear that Warner looks down on this set of cultural forms, not least because the city as a space is so oddly insubstantial in this text in spite of its concrete fabrication. By way of comparison, the non-urban landscapes in the novel – a fantastic mixture of British moorland and fields, European alpine passes and exotic jungles – have a far greater sense of solidity about them. Warner uses light as a trope to expose the translucent quality of the capital, turning the Enlightenment image of the light of reason on its head. Much as Zamyatin's *One State* is enclosed by the translucent glass "green wall", Warner's city is encased by a concrete roof, which is permanently lit by "the flares of gigantic arc lamps" so that

There seemed in the whole town no shadow, so numerous, so powerful, and so diversely disposed were the electric lights, and it was perhaps this face which made George inclined to look upon the people who hurried shadowless to and fro as unreal figures, embodied but only just, and the buildings, rectangular and gleaming, appeared purposeless, as if made of sugar or of something else inappropriate for human architecture.

(Warner 1945b, 166)

To Warner the "stubborn" yet strangely "insubstantial" concrete is of a piece with the violent, irrational (or more accurately *anti-rational*) laughter of the townspeople, a hellish barking in the face of any sincerity. There is something spectral about these "shadowless," "unreal" figures, and it is left ambiguous as to whether "human architecture" refers to the forms of humans themselves, or the buildings of the town. The attempt to control the conditions of life by turning the city into a vast concrete dome, shutting those inside off from the rest of the population upon whose labour the city relies, leads to it becoming a place of vice and authoritarian violence. However, it also leads to a sort of fading of the quality of material experience. While most townspeople are apparently content to limit their cultural pursuits to tennis and the creation of

artificial shrubberies under the concrete roof, in the depths of the Convent researchers engage in ever more sadistic experiments in an attempt to feel anything at all.

Outwardly, Warner's novel is an "allegory of Marxist education", and an example of what was widely termed in the 1930s "Public-School Communism", a movement associated especially with Warner's good friend Cecil Day-Lewis (Reeve 1989, 35, 39). Yet in his "vivid description" of the cruelty of the city and its life, Reeve (1989, 35) contends that Warner draws "inspiration from Swift's *Laputa* and from the satires of Wyndham Lewis". Despite their politics being so different, the influence of Lewis on Warner seems to extend to his political elitism and the disdain for those of the middle classes with limited cultural capital (F. Jameson 1979, 30). For Reeve (1989, 46), George's values of "cleanliness, athletic grace, rural purity, unsophisticated sex" come uncomfortably close to fascism. A fascinating experiment in the limits of allegory for an age in which modernist formal experimentation and realist political commitment collided with each other, Warner's allegory is ultimately unable to overcome class prejudice, and the Public School ethos which underpins the adventures retains this ideologically uncomfortable edge.<sup>4</sup> Unlike Swift or even Lewis, Warner's text is compromised by a failure to follow the logic of his political stance beyond the comfort of his preconceived values.

### In the Second Year

Notwithstanding its limitations, Warner's accomplishment in *The Wild Goose Chase* is to reinvigorate the allegorical form by structuring it around a fantastic otherness which encourages political interpretation by virtue of its very resistance to simple historical correspondences. Storm Jameson's naturalistic near-future dystopian allegory *In the Second Year* (1936), takes a directly opposite tack: the historical correspondences of the novel are clear from early on and sustained until the very end. This close relationship to empirical reality enables Jameson to achieve a moral force that *The Wild Goose Chase* lacks.

Jameson's allegory is set a few short years into the future during the months of April–July. Although the story focuses on national politics, the text opens in Yorkshire, not London, where narrator Andrew Hillier has returned from his lecturing post in Oslo to spend time with his sister Lotte. Locating the opening scenes in the north of England, Jameson immediately introduces the importance of landscape to regional culture, and in turn the relationship of such patterns of thinking to provincial conceptions of national identity.

Lotte is married to General Richard Sacker, whose allegorical counterpart is Ernst Röhm (1887–1934), Chief of Staff of the Nazi *Sturmabteilung* (SA), also known as the "Brownshirts". Sacker heads a 1.5 million strong "National Volunteers" militia, closely paralleling the SA. A year previously, we are told, the National Volunteers' brutality was central to the success of a "National State" Party coup launched when the effects of capital flight

following Labour election victory led to widespread riots and the collapse of the new government. The party's leader Frank Hillier has cemented his position as effective dictator in the year since he assumed the role, ruling with a council in place of parliament. Hillier is also Sacker's childhood friend and Andy's second cousin.

Sacker sinisterly calls the period which immediately followed his Party's "bloodless revolution – apart from the drops of blood shed by your Red friends" (S. Jameson 2004, 77). But his salaried militia is now seen as a financial drain on the state and potentially threatening to the military (albeit that the regular army views them disparagingly). Thomas Chamberlayn, a financier and government advisor, is lobbying for their disbanding. So too is Sacker's rival Colonel Hebden, who serves as Air Minister in addition to being commander of Hillier's bodyguard, the "Special corps of the National Volunteer Guard". As the novel's editor Stan Smith states in his introduction, Hebden is "clearly modelled on Hitler's second-in-command, Hermann Goering" (S. Jameson 2004, xii).

Throughout the ensuing power plays among a dictatorial elite, Jameson's naturalist story world resists dominant London-centric characterisations of England. The shift in action to rural locations in Yorkshire and Derbyshire shows the effects of high politics on the wider population, and points to the necessity for national agreement in order to bring about the sort of revolutionary changes to the nature of the state which the politics of the National State Party demands. Jameson positions the northern regions, whose manufacturing industries were an important driver of the national economy in the 1930s, in a central determining role for the fate of the country as a whole. The National Party are populists whose power in Whitehall is backed by their mobilisation of support in the regions. This is underlined by Richard Sacker's local popularity among a deferent working class group who work in the fishing industry and visit him in the servants' quarters of his house. As Andy Hillier tells us, "these men and women liked and understood Richard. They admired his violence and hot temper" (S. Jameson 2004, 110). The danger of fascism, Jameson warns the reader, resides precisely in this appeal. The radical left are no match to Sacker's winning combination of charismatic charm and violent outbursts: the working-class communist Myers, a Jewish intellectual in London, could never hope to be accepted by these northerners in the manner that the upper class Sacker is feted.

This is not to suggest, however, that for Jameson there is a natural affinity of the North and northerners with fascism: many political opponents of the regime have northern backgrounds. The point is rather that the landscapes of Derbyshire and Yorkshire take an active role in conditioning the actions of characters, and as such represent a living part of the identity of the characters who reside there. The generative importance of the North to the plot as a place of action and counter-balance to the politics of Westminster is central to Jameson's vision of England. To take one example, the Yorkshire moors are home to "Winchell", the "re-education camp" for political prisoners that

swallows political opponents and hides their disappearance from the outside world. The camp is described as a “quadrangle of barbed wire”, built “on ground levelled from the heather”. The bleak, infertile moorland is unforgiving for this imposition and survival is a struggle under the leadership of the sadistic camp commandment Steadman, a man so obsessed with control that he plants around his hut “ragged wallflowers and a thorn hedge, mocked by the gorse which alone flourished up here” (S. Jameson 2004, 38). The landscape is a difficult environment for all human endeavours and it seems to actively resent the imposition of metal barbs and prisoners alike.

Yet the moorland landscape is no untouched wilderness: a few miles away Andy Hillier finds a long-abandoned quarry, evidencing the prolonged struggles of local people to inhabit the infertile land. While out for a “walk over these bleaker miles, with the sea on my right hand and a few wild valleys on the left, where were now and then poor farms or a struggling village” (S. Jameson 2004, 112) he encounters an escapee from the prison camp. The prisoner is hiding in a womb-like cave which has merged into the lie of the land. The abandoned quarry has been reclaimed by “a bed of ling and brambles”, demonstrating the agency of the landscape. Accepting the conditions of the land rather than trying to act against it, the prisoner feels at home living as a hermit, and by night stealing food from local houses (including that of Richard Sackers).

When Andy offers him the chance to escape to Norway, the escaped prisoner responds, “I’ve lived in England all my life and I’d rather go on living here even if I had to eat roots” (S. Jameson 2004, 113). Despite his hopeless situation, the escapee remains out of a sense of patriotism that is something like habit: an adaptation to the landscape rather than belief in any political creed beyond a vague sense of “belonging” that would be emotionally difficult to part from. All that he can hope for is that the fate of the abandoned quarry thick with bramble bushes points to the ultimate fate of the concentration camp, which some day will be abandoned and return to its previous “wild” state.

Andy’s offer of help to the convict is one of a series of moments that mark him as a morally and politically ambiguous, untrustworthy narrator. On the one hand, the visit to Winchell is part of the mission he sets himself to explore some of the darker sides of the new state. Not only does he offer to help the escaped prisoner, he also tries without success to save a female writer from the camp and to have the sadistic camp commandant Steadman removed from office. Andy Hillier closely observes and reports upon the poverty of the unemployed and the young in Yorkshire, Derbyshire and London. He goes out of his way to make the acquaintance of socialists and Communists opposed to the regime, and spends considerable time relating their passionate refusals to be cowed even when their lives are in danger: he even visits the second-rate poet and Jewish communist Myers after he has been beaten and left to slowly die by Hebden’s young Lieutenant Eckhart.

On the other hand, even as he learns more about the reality of the regime and is sickened by its worst excesses, Andy becomes involved as go-between

for a plot forming between Sacker and a corrupt ex-minister called Smith to oust Hebden and Chamberlayn, “saving” Hillier from their influence. Sacker is clear throughout that his aim is to cement Hillier’s power and that of the National State party (and through it, his own position). Sacker’s call for a “second revolution”, in which conditions for the poor are improved through the implementation of his nationalist idea of “socialism”, is as hollow as were the attempts to improve working-class conditions in fascist Italy and Germany (and just as restricted to the so-called “native” working class).

Eventually, an opportunist ex-Labour minister enlisted in this plot called Denham betrays them when he realises it is unlikely to succeed. Sacker is arrested, and Smith is shot “avoiding arrest”, much as General Kurt von Schleicher (1882–1934) had been in Germany. Like Röhm, Sacker is given a revolver to shoot himself, but refuses, saying “send for [Frank] Hillier. Let him do his own dirty work” (S. Jameson 2004, 177). Stan Smith points out that this exactly parallels Röhm’s declaration “If I am to be killed, let Adolf do it himself” (Smith in S. Jameson 2004, xiii). Sacker is then taken to Hebden’s HQ and shot. On hearing the news, Lotte commits suicide. After a stormy interview with Hillier, Andy is permitted to leave the country never to return. On his way he helps Sacker’s teenage nephew, an unenthusiastic member of the Volunteers, to escape with his girlfriend to Norway by boat.

### **“A ghost living for the moment in the future”**

As a naturalistic text set in the near future (there are only hints that the novel is set five years hence), *In the Second Year* represents an important stage in the evolution of the dystopian genre. The novel’s treatment of futurity and temporality becomes a pressing concern when Andy Hillier comments, “I had the most curious feeling that I was not here in the flesh, I was a ghost living for the moment in the future. I saw faces, heard young excited voices, but their owners were living in another moment as children, and I, only I, knew what they were living toward” (S. Jameson 2004, 71). As a ghost in the future Andy Hillier is the spectral presence of the past – the authorial present. This is an explicit invitation to the reader to identify with the subject-position of the narrator in order to foresee the fascist future that could await a complacent Britain. The reader is being encouraged to live “for the moment in the future” with a prophetic sense of the impending catastrophe to come. This is in tune with the slightly awkward phrasing of the paratextual note preceding the novel’s text: “The time of the book is in the future; from the end of April to the two or three days following June 30”. I suggest the significance of this statement is that through the narrator the reader is asked to participate in the book’s “time”, and to become in effect a spectral presence in its narrative. As with other dystopias which have a clearer sense of what I have termed the future-as-past, there is creative and active work for the reader to do in piecing together how the world of the authorial present could become the time of the National State party dictatorship.

The temporality not only suggests a predictive future but a layering of allegorical pasts: on one level is the aforementioned plot that led to the Night of the Long Knives in which Hitler disbanded the SA and purged the Nazi Party. Nattie Golubov, however, suggests that *In the Second Year* is also a “direct response to the 1931 crisis” when MacDonald’s first Labour government collapsed, pointing to the fact that Andrew Hillier “holds the Labour government responsible for his cousin Frank Hillier’s rise to power” (Golubov 2007, 94) just as Jameson had in her essay “The Twilight of Reason” blamed the rise of Nazism in Germany partly on the “collapse of doctrinaire Socialism” (quoted in Golubov 2007, 94). In this schema, Ramsey MacDonald is the hero-turned-villain of the piece. He had led Labour to their first minority (1924) and then majority (1929–1931) governments, but when he defected from Labour to lead the coalition national government his historical role within the Labour movement was “whitewashed from the party accounts”, and “the great betrayal became a standard explanation for the interruption to Labour’s forward march, the roots of which could be traced to failings in MacDonald’s character evident long before 1931” (Cohen 2009, 101). Furthermore, Golubov reminds us, it was in direct response to the Labour party’s failure to take action (particularly to follow any of his own suggestions) that Oswald Mosley resigned the whip and formed his own British Union of Fascists (Golubov 2007, 94).

The temporal manoeuvre of Jameson’s spectral narrating presence is then a prophetic warning which allegorises events in both Germany in 1934 and Britain in 1931 into a future narrative, in order that the reader might gain greater insight into the future path of history than the actors in that future history, even with access to the same historical knowledge, can themselves possess. Wrapping herself in the generic trappings and temporal relations of dystopian fiction, Jameson transforms it into a tool of political and historical analysis which is both pointed and surprisingly subtle in its allegorical content.

The temporal relations are further complicated by virtue of the fact that several of the chapters are written in a similar style to those which Andy narrates, but without his first person interjections and recollected insights. Andy could not be present during the scenes around which these chapters are structured – for the plot to function he could not have knowledge of what passes in them until later in the story and in some cases only after the end point of the novel. Hence these scenes are either contrived after the fact and the details of conversations made-up (and it is worth noting that by the end of the story Andy still does not know about all of these meetings, and in some cases the characters involved have died), or they are the reportage of a second narrator. If the former is the case, then Andy’s reliability as a narrator is seriously undermined. If the latter, then the structure of the novel is far less straightforward than at first appears.

Andy Hillier places peculiar emphasis upon accurate recording of details. Nineteen of the novel’s thirty-three chapters open with a sentence that at least incidentally records the date and/or time of the action, and seventeen chapters

(there is some cross-over) mention a location or record travel between named points in the opening sentence. The specificity of the novel's arrangements of time and space are clearly of great importance. Even when, as in the opening of chapter ten of Part II of the novel, his memory alone is insufficient to verify facts, Andy makes efforts to be accurate: "The next evening – I can fix it by what happened later – Lotte, Richard, and I were at dinner" (S. Jameson 2004, 90). The proleptic hint that he possesses future knowledge here reinforces his reliability as the spectral reporter with an ability to move between temporal locations as well as to observe from a quasi-neutral or disinterested stance.

As the story progresses, Andy's concern with being accurate in his reporting is increasingly at odds with the agenda he pursues. When he professes to the "turncoat" Denham that "my sympathies are neither here nor there. I am only anxious to hear the truth" (S. Jameson 2004, 66), the latter immediately smells a rat. Andy has already made the decision to back Sacker's plot, stating that he "was very willing" (2004, 56) to act as go-between for the plotters and later justifying it because, he says, he has "a very small axe" (2004, 96) to grind, namely the removal of the "Training Camp" Commandant Steadman, and the release of the political prisoner and writer Sophie Burt. Pursuing the most tentative reformism that fails to scratch the surface of the brutality of the regime, the "very small axe" is a symbolic opposition rather than a practical attempt to force anyone associated with the regime to see the line between their actions and the suffering of the poor in the capital and northern England alike.

Andy Hillier provides a subject position from which to probe the society in which the novel is set, but he seems more like one of the reporting visitors common to the utopian genre who has lost his way and found himself in a dystopian setting than the typical protagonist of a dystopian novel, who is a fully fledged but increasingly alienated member of the dystopian society. Storm Jameson's novel is structured around multiple political dialogues. These dialogues are mostly between Andy as the outsider visitor and individuals who function as representatives of various political and social groups, much like the "class representatives or 'types'" that Fredric Jameson (2002, 65) associates with Balzac – a writer whom both of Storm Jameson's biographers agree was influential during her long career (see Birkett 2009, 65–66; Maslen 2014, 470).

As with many canonical literary utopias, this series of dialogues generally sees Andy's interlocutors get the better of him. In a utopia like William Morris's *News From Nowhere* (1888) or Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1887), the overcoming of the visitor's objections serves the rhetorical function of demonstrating the superiority of the utopian vision which the novel advocates. But when Andy finds himself agreeing with the fascist Sacker, the turncoat Denham or with the communist Myers, it demonstrates only that his liberal humanist values are inadequate to deal with real world problems of the 1930s. Hence, when Denham argues that his switch of allegiance "brought the workers calmly and loyally into line... Our reward is that socialist planning will now go forward on a national basis", Andy acknowledges that, "I accepted the

truth of all he said” and yet “detested him for it” (S. Jameson 2004, 66–67). He then reveals the essentially reactionary basis of his own liberalism: “I should like to have been born in some other age, say the eighteenth century, when it was still possible to believe in progress”. Andy is implicitly harking back to the Enlightenment, which he simplistically seems to characterise as being based on a belief that through liberal freedom and the informed use of reason mankind could affect material, political and moral progress.

However, later in the narrative when the Communist Myers is slowly dying, Andy refers to the eighteenth century rather differently as a time of brutality, when “you hired bullies... to beat up your enemies” (S. Jameson 2004, 93), a point which as Stan Smith notes (in S. Jameson 2004, xxii) Andy’s friend Lewis picks up at Myers’ funeral (2004, 103). Lewis’s point here, however, is that the English have always supported “common cruelties”, such as the nineteenth-century “employment of infants, flogging in jails, and so forth. You might be surprised to know how few years we had to retrace to come to this moment” (2004, 103). Far from being a foreign import, the seeds of English fascism lie in the recent past whenever a blind eye was turned to institutionalised violence.

Andy’s retort to Lewis’s suggestion that the English have a long and uninterrupted history of supporting “common cruelties”, is that “it was liberal ideas that made us ashamed of brutality”. Yet liberalism not only tolerated but indeed actively encouraged the imperialism in which Britain was still engaging and in the service of which great cruelty was daily perpetrated. The question of imperialism and the role it played in Britain’s approach to the question of fascism in the 1930s intersects with responses to European migration (especially Jews and other members of minority groups trying to leave Germany either for Britain or for British mandate Palestine), the independence movements in India and elsewhere, and perhaps most directly Britain’s approach to the failing League of Nations.

As Andy Hillier proceeds to question other characters in order to gain insight into life under the regime of the National party, he tests out his failing liberal humanist values against life experiences which other characters disclose. For the reader it is of little surprise that his political strategies fail along with Sacker’s plot. Notably, Lewis and Andy Hillier are the lone survivors of those who seek to oppose the regime in whole or in part and Lewis makes clear that he expects Andy to “read one day that I have been shot resisting arrest” (S. Jameson 2004, 214). Lewis, in other words, fully expects Andy to survive because as a liberal he is unlikely to take the same type of personal risks for the sake of political principle. When he first learns of Andy’s political persuasion Lewis reacts furiously. To Andy’s statement that as a liberal he is “opposed to all repression” (2004, 94), Lewis retorts that,

By chattering of peace where there is no peace you have become the ally, the cover for Thomas Chamberlain. You’re joined to him, and beyond him to Hebden the bully. You murdered Myers. You keep up the Training



Camps. You and your blood brothers in the Labour Party, who fought no one but the communists, who held back here, and retreated there, who opposed reaction with their tongues and turned their bottoms to it to be kicked, who worked for friendly relations with the owning classes and took themselves in righteousness of legality and held the door open for repression to come legally in.

(S. Jameson 2004, 95)

For Lewis, liberals maintain the class system and help keep the fascists in power: Andy's part in the plot to oust Hebden and Chamberlain is inconsequential compared to the legitimisation which liberal quiescence offers the regime. This attack on Andy's liberalism is particularly hard-hitting because it draws on tropes Jameson has already established to tie the Labour party hierarchy and liberals in the political centre ground to the advance of the far right: the reference to blood brothers recalls the homoerotic bonds of Richard Sacker and Frank Hillier during their youth for example, and the description of liberals proffering their bottoms to be kicked recalls Sacker's own exclamation, "you liberals are the murderers of our day – you were born to be kicked". Andy himself has previously described Sacker's vision of "the England he would create when he and his friends were in charge" as being "nothing more than a fearful sort of public school, with willing fags, a glorious hierarchy of heroes in the persons of himself and his Volunteers, and floggings for the unwilling or rebellious" (S. Jameson 2004, 77).

The surprising convergence of arguments against liberal attitudes from left and right back Andy into a corner, and in the end he can only espouse an English exceptionalism that sits in stark contradiction to the liberal cosmopolitan values he otherwise professes: in relation to the threat of full totalitarianism, Andy asserts, "I do not believe that it is inevitable in England. The English are different. There is a tough root of belief in them" (S. Jameson 2004, 213). It is significant that this exceptionalism is the only value of Andy's that is not seriously challenged by other characters, and it means that while the question of whether there is "an underground movement against the destroyers" remains unanswered, he is left emptied of his identification with the past but unable to imagine any future either: "I have lost both worlds, I thought. Even the safety towards which I was going had neither comfort nor attraction for me now" (2004, 215). Rather than a rallying call by the liberal narrator for peaceful resistance to the fascist regime, we are left with a narrator whose quiescence leads to him simply having run out of anything to say at all.

### **Professors, peace and betrayal**

In Rex Warner's second novel *The Professor* (1938) liberal inaction in the face of revolutionary dilemmas is taken one stage further. The eponymous professor of Classics is asked to form a national unity government at a time of crisis and the novel tracks the period until his assassination a week later. He is

a man who “believed against all the evidence, scholar though he was, not only in the existence but in the efficacy” of liberal humanism (Warner 1986, 13) and he “vainly seeks to uphold the liberal virtues during a crisis which his very anxiety to be tolerant and responsible prevents him from understanding” (Reeve 1989, 14), (though significantly he assumes power without being elected). There is then a blind spot in the Professor’s character from the outset analogous to the flaw of a Classical tragic hero. A weakness in his scholarship puts faith in liberal humanism above “all evidence” to the contrary. For Reeve (1989, 53), this flaw “prevented him from putting into practice the tenets of objectivity and rational judgement which he upheld, and... had he done so, he too would have accepted the narrator’s conclusions”. While Jameson’s allegory preaches the moral imperative for resistance even in a hopeless situation, Warner’s narrative begins before fascist power is cemented, at a point when effective organisation could still prevent it.

The narrator makes the didactic content of Warner’s allegory evident from the very first page: this is a tragedy that serves to warn of the consequences of failing to accept the strict historical necessity of Popular Front socialism. The novel opens during one of the Professor’s lectures in the capital of an unnamed Republic closely resembling Austria. The dialogic structure of the allegory is quickly established when the Professor’s son interrupts to *allegorically* interpret his father’s description of Sophocles in terms of the recent bombing of “a neighbouring country”, and a young member of the fascist “National Legion” party responds with an antisemitic and anti-intellectual outburst. The Professor attempts to mediate between the two in a patronising speech, reminding them to keep their analyses to “the long and difficult process of reasoning” (Warner 1986, 25). But here we also have the first intimation of a “disquietening” mood: both students, the Professor worries, implicitly assume that the state “must be, in some way, either reconstituted or purged”. This is entirely contrary to his own adherence to Socratic ideals in which the “framework of the laws” allows “for reason and persuasion to promote the growth towards that ideal state of affairs which we all seek” (1986, 26–27).

On his way to the Chancellery, at a place resembling Speaker’s Corner in Hyde Park, London, the Professor describes his plan “to put before the people almost the whole economic programme of the Left together with a plea for nation unity in the face of the foreign danger” (Warner 1986, 46) to an “old man”, who ridicules these ideas. Before he can accept the Chancellorship, the same man appears in another disguise and fakes an (easily preventable) attempt on the Professor’s life. In private, he reveals himself to the Professor as an undercover policeman and, unbeknownst to his superiors, a communist. This Sargent Jinkerman will later save the Professor’s life on several occasions, establishing as an allegorical trope the unpaid debt which liberalism owes to communists in interwar Europe as fighters against fascism. The act stands in contrast to the self-interested politicking of the Professor’s Cabinet, who feign incompetence in the face of a neighbouring country’s demands for the government to be changed on pain of invasion.

The Cabinet's talk and apparent inaction also stands opposed to the work of Julius Vander, an officer of the National Legion, whom the Professor encounters on his walk home later that evening. When the Professor labels him a "cynic" for his selfish might-is-right attitude, Vander retorts, "cynicism is a mood for men who are disappointed in their hopes. I am far from being that. I merely say that I would rather have power, a good drink, and plenty of women than international peace... And meanwhile you go on mooning about 'ethical ideals'" (Warner 1986, 105). Vander draws out an irony that underpins the whole plot: the views of the Professor are simply irrelevant to powerful strains of political action on left and right. Later, in a dream sequence after Vander's death, the Professor defends him in a court of Law, but only after he finishes speaking does he realize that "all this time he had been speaking in Greek, a language which, without any question, would be unfamiliar to the whole jury" (1986, 132). The Professor is out of place and out of time, and his intellectualising means nothing to a public he is supposed to serve. Time and again he is unable to communicate because the framework he uses for discussion is irrelevant.

The Professor has misinterpreted the aims of the National League as essentially a reactionary conservative movement because of their public claims to want to "restore the old morality in its original purity, to fight for the family, the nation". Refusing to see the genuine *mass* appeal of fascism, the Professor therefore fails to take aboard Vander's warning when he says, "Will I put anything in the place of your ideals? Yes, I will. I will put their direct opposites in their place. And, what is more, people will like it" (Warner 1986, 107). Warner here anticipates Hannah Arendt's observation in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that a major attraction of the totalitarian movements of the 1920s and 1930s was their dropping of any pretence to the respectability of bourgeois mores and values. These were ostentatiously violent movements, publicly whipping up hate:

The propaganda of totalitarian movements which precede and accompany totalitarian regimes is invariably as frank as it is mendacious, and would-be totalitarian rulers usually start their careers by boasting of their past crimes and carefully outlining their future ones. The Nazis 'were convinced that evil-doing in our time has a morbid force of attraction'.  
(Arendt 1966, 307)<sup>5</sup>

The Professor is wrong to believe that the National Legion is in fact a party at all in the liberal democratic sense. As a totalitarian *movement* it represents an attempt to change the fundamental nature of the modern state as such, to do away with party politics in their entirety. Warner makes a similar point to Storm Jameson as outlined above: centre-left liberals are fundamentally unfitted to 1930s politics because they fail to recognise that the formal basis of national politics has changed. It is not simply that liberals and fascists adopt different approaches to statecraft, but rather that they

have radically different conceptions of what constitutes the field of politics in the first place.

The Professor believes in the separation of public and private spheres, in natural justice, and in parliamentary politics as a process of dialogic discussion based upon the human faculties of reasoning and rhetoric. At one point he ponders precisely what it is that binds him to his country: "'Justice,' he whispered, stretching out his hands as though in confident appeal to some impartial court, 'justice that can be demonstrated mathematically, that is what I have to give'" (Warner 1986, 76). This should not be interpreted as merely the petty vanity of a momentarily indulged fantasy. At the core of the Professor's "confident appeal" is a historical and philosophical contradiction. On the one hand, such an "appeal to some impartial court" suggests a Classicist's understanding of the importance of rhetoric, which had persisted in Europe until the early 1600s. In the words of Stephen Toulmin (1990, 30), "the external conditions on which 'arguments' – i.e. public utterances – carry conviction with any given audience were accepted as on a par with the internal steps relied on in the relevant 'arguments' – i.e. strings of statement". On the other hand, the belief in "justice that can be demonstrated mathematically", which could have been written by Zamyatin's D-503, shows a post-Cartesian belief that an argument should be assessed on the basis of its internal relations alone, making the circumstances in which an argument is performatively made irrelevant.

Such justice by numbers is so utilitarian as to reduce its whole pursuit to one of administration. Even Vander, in his perverse defence of "the real morality whose springs are lust for life, fear, and hatred" (Warner 1986, 112) which stands upon little more than attaching the term "real" to anything that lies in his own self-interest ("real" morality; "real" men; "real" (psychological) forces and so on) recognises how such abstract appeals are destined to fail. At the end of the dialogue between Vander and the Professor, Jinkerman emerges from behind a curtain to kill Vander when he demands the Professor's resignation at gunpoint. As Reeve (1989, 51) notes, "the quick and decisive action of the communist rescues the liberal simultaneously from a fascist threat and from an impasse created by his own impotence", condensing the allegorical content of the chapter into one moment. The bloodstain which reaches the leg of the Professor's writing table clearly speaks to the attempts of liberals to avoid active engagement in anti-fascist struggle in the mid-1930s (for example the British Government's refusal to oppose fascist war-making in Spain through material action). It is finally only threats and the use of violence that put an end to the debate between Vander and the Professor. While Jinkerman is sick after he admits he "has never killed anyone before", the Professor puts a comforting arm around him without saying anything – not even a word of thanks for saving his life.

This is an important moment of transition, marking the Professor as a tragic figure who never moves beyond his blinkered "foolishness and vanity" (Reeve 1989, 70) before it is too late. Jinkerman, like the Professor's own son, stands

by his communism irrespective of any “private claims, tribulations, desires for vengeance, or even enthusiastic optimism, had they any to offer”, and for Reeve the Professor’s liberalism “is not in any sense a discipline, which could be practised impersonally, but an attitude inseparable from the character of whoever holds it” and therefore can be distinguished from socialism in psychological terms, “as much as aims and policies” (Reeve 1989, 70). From this perspective it is hardly surprising that when the Professor has to go on the run from the National Legion, a poor Christian cobbler (Jinkerman’s father) is able to condemn his attitude as much as his actions for being immoral.

The Professor’s son does not act solely from cool disinterested reason. In telling his father that his girlfriend has killed herself after she was raped and tortured by members of the National Legion, he describes “two worlds at war, a party of hate and a party of love” (Warner 1986, 160). The son’s affective view of politics links personal suffering and his own grief with a wider policy interest: he uses the episode as evidence that his father should recognise those within his administration working against him and quickly arm the workers to prevent a coup by at the hands of the neighbouring country’s army and the National Legion. Whereas the Professor’s son mobilises his affective response as a means to bolster his argument, connecting the dots between personal experience and political life, his father resolutely refuses to critically analyse the motives of individuals who represent institutions of state such as the Chief of Police Colonel Grimm, or to learn the allegorical lesson from a scene he witnesses from his car when a National Legion protest group receives highly sympathetic treatment from police in comparison to the violence being perpetrated against a group of nearby socialist factory workers. When Grimm through ungainly twists in logic argues that the National Legion is both well intended and non-violent in methods, the Professor fails to bring to his attention the rape and torture of the young woman at their hands he learned of only an hour previously. The Professor’s son argues from evidence; the Professor himself in subsuming all knowledge to blind belief in abstract liberal concepts like “democracy” (though he is an unelected appointee) and “freedom” (though he refuses to act to safeguard this) is complicit and even an active participant in his own downfall and that of the Republic.

Colonel Grimm launches his coup while the Professor is attempting to win over the country with a lecture on the national radio network, and his speech symbolically disappears into a dead microphone. Instead, the population hears accusations of treason against the Professor himself. The Professor only now realises that “I should have put myself at the head of revolutionaries in order to avoid being accused of having done so”. In response Jinkerman tells him, “you would not arm your own ideas” (Warner 1986, 198). In common with Storm Jameson, the protagonist of Warner’s second novel is destined to failure because he refuses to meet fascist violence with force. In doing so, he turns his back on the victims of such violence. The didactic message of both Jameson’s and Warner’s allegories is that fascism can only be defeated through the practice of solidarity with its victims, which must include the

credible threat of force. Between Warner's first and second novels, his attitude toward revolutionary violence turned from one of celebration to a more sober reflection of it as a structural necessity.

The re-emergence of allegory in political committed writing of the 1930s allowed writers such as Rex Warner and Margaret Storm Jameson to interrogate specific historical threats as well as broader questions of political and social values. Warner and Jameson performed their critiques using many of the techniques and tools-in-trade of dystopian fiction. At the same time, their novels diverge significantly from some of the generic tropes and conventions discussed on p. 1. The move toward allegory in the 1930s was important for the development of dystopia as a genre dealing in narratives of world politics. The period saw change to some formal conventions and continuity in other regards. Both Jameson and Warner's fiction describe in detail the horrors of dystopian regimes and their effects upon the broader population, and they serve a cautionary purpose directed at a specific audience (the English). These dystopian allegories demand their readers actively think through social contradictions, and reflect on the gap between the fictive and the present lived reality, just as far-future dystopias engage the reader in a creative process in the reconstruction of future-history (between the authorial present and the fictive future).

Chapter five turns to the 1930s fiction of Katharine Burdekin. In both published texts such as *Swastika Night* (1937) and unpublished novels available in her archives, Burdekin's future set and time travel narratives draw allegory and temporal modes of critique (most obviously the future-as-past) together with a sustained engagement with myth. Like Jameson and Warner, her opposition to fascism often utilises a sense of *belonging* bound up with the English countryside of specific provincial regions. As we shall see, here specific arrangements of time and space as the organising principles of dystopian narrative are again used to affect discursive political interventions.

## Notes

- 1 To extend the logic of Lawrence's esoteric argument, the return of allegory would also represent the "self-glorification" of "The Patmothers" who celebrate "the middling" and give up the "best collective being" of *man* that occurs when the ordinary "give homage and allegiance to a hero" (Lawrence 1995, 68). Lawrence's ostensibly aesthetic argument is essentially underpinned here by fascistic cod-Nietzschean political values.
- 2 The essay, published in Warner's 1945 collection *The Cult of Power*, is based upon a talk given in 1938 (see Tabachnick 2002, 122).
- 3 The writers I examine here rarely if ever use inclusive terms to describe the British Isles/North Atlantic Archipelago.
- 4 Warner was a (not uncritical) supporter of Public Schools: when after the War the Fleming Report threatened the end of these elitist institutions, Warner wrote a pamphlet for William Collins' "Britain in Pictures" series, in which he rhetorically asked, "why don't they build Public Schools for everyone? Then there would be no advantage in having been to one" (1945a, 9).
- 5 Arendt is here quoting Franz Borkenau (1940, 231) which, coincidentally, George Orwell favourably reviewed for *Time and Tide* (4 May 1940) (rpt in Orwell 1998, 12:158–60).

## 5 Nazism, myth and the pastoral in Katharine Burdekin's dystopian fiction

### Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed allegorical novels by Storm Jameson and Rex Warner which used dystopian tropes, structures and themes to effect critiques of the rise of fascism in Germany, its spill into Austria, and the response of the left. Katharine Burdekin's 1930s fiction considers the broader problem of fascism for the fate of the whole world. If Jameson and Warner use the dystopian mode as a type of allegorical hermeneutic tool, then Burdekin engages dystopia as a form closely bound up with myth and mythology. In her 1937 novel *Swastika Night*, Burdekin imagines a future world split between long established German and Japanese feudal empires, whose control has been absolute since they defeated every other world power in the distant past. In this world Hitler has been raised to the status of a seven-foot blond god, and the official "Hitlerian" religion preaches a "spurious Germanic mythology" (Patai 1984, 86; and see Stock 2016, 435) of racial superiority and extreme misogyny. Women are kept like cattle in cages, Christians live as outcast subsistence farmers and Jews have long since been wiped out. The novel tells the story of an Englishman, Alfred, who meets an unusual Nazi knight while visiting his old friend (and implied lover) Hermann in Germany. The Knight of Hohenlinden, von Hess (a direct descendent of Rudolph Hess, who was at the time Burdekin wrote the novel second only to Goering in the Nazi hierarchy below Hitler), has no male heirs. He therefore entrusts to Alfred a secret encyclopaedic book written by his ancestor who lived some hundred years after the authorial present. The book was written when the Nazis decided to destroy all existing history books and non-German culture so as to enshrine their entirely fictitious mythology as historical "truth".

Alfred returns to England where Hermann, who consents to be banished by the Knight on specious charges, subsequently joins him. The Stonehenge hideout where Alfred, his son and Hermann gather to read the book is discovered by Nazi soldiers and in the ensuing violence Hermann is killed and Alfred mortally wounded. Alfred's son escapes undetected with the book, which he entrusts to a community of illiterate Christians. As Christians form a Pagan-like oppositional culture viewed by Nazis as unclean and heretical,

they are also unlikely to be searched. The novel ends with Alfred asking his son to oppose the Nazis while refraining from the impulsive violence that has led Alfred himself to his deathbed.

Critical work on Burdekin has tended to focus on gender relations and sexuality. Daphne Patai, who established in the 1980s that the pseudonym "Murray Constantine" belonged to Katharine Burdekin, characterises her as an important and neglected feminist voice in a genre that was otherwise male-dominated until the 1960s, surmising that "above all, Burdekin was concerned with the pervasiveness of male power and female powerlessness and with the kind of world that this created in both the public and the private spheres" (Patai 1993, 231).<sup>1</sup> Debra Shaw (2000, 42) argues that Burdekin's major contribution lies more specifically in her early "recognition of the importance of understanding the link between misogyny and fascism", and she highlights Burdekin's *Proud Man* (1934) together with *Swastika Night* as "important for their thoroughgoing analysis of the psychological construction of gender identity, more than two decades before Lacanian psychoanalysis and the burgeoning second wave of feminism prepared the way for an understanding of gender ideology and sexual politics". Shaw reads *Swastika Night* as anticipating Klaus Theweleit's work *Male Fantasies* (1980) in unpicking the psychology and interpellation of the ex-military *Freikorps* of the 1920s who provided the most violent backing to the NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party) – commonly known as the Nazi Party)<sup>2</sup> during its rise to power.<sup>3</sup> More recently, Elizabeth English (2015) has addressed some of the limitations of Burdekin's sexual and gender politics.

Any adequate reading of Burdekin's work must acknowledge the centrality of gender and sexuality. However, she also taps into cultural anxieties, raising uncannily prescient and disturbing questions across a wide range of issues. In addition to gender and sexuality, here I want to explore what Burdekin's texts can tell us about the use of myth in politics and political fiction, and to question the mythopoetic values which underpin the novel's pastoral setting.

This chapter begins with an exploration of Burdekin's treatment of religion in *Swastika Night*. I contend that she treats Nazism as a broad based popular political religion grounded in paligenetic myth. To make this argument requires substantial unpacking of key issues at the core of internal NSDAP debates about "blood", "race", religion and ethno-nationalist myths. Understanding these remains important to effective opposition to neo-Nazi ideology to this day. Using both published novels and original archival research I compare Burdekin's treatment of Nazi mythmaking to her own use of new and existing religious myths. In Burdekin's characteristically modernist work myth becomes an epistemological tool by which different forms of knowledge can arise. It is through this understanding that in texts like the unpublished typescript *Children of Jacob* (1938) she attempts to use the structures of Biblical myth to critique Nazi ideology, and to re-state her argument about the relationship between fascism and misogyny in even stronger terms. In this text



especially, Burdekin's very use of myth to critique fascism creates tensions. It is precisely in the mythic content of Nazism that a dangerously alluring justification for masculine power structures can be found, and such forms of entrenched violence are hypostatized under Nazism. The problem for Burdekin is that opposing German fascism to mythical constructions of the English countryside involves the replacement of one misogynistic racist ideology with another set of myths no less historically situated and contingent. These too are tied to issues at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, nationality and class. By privileging the pastoral Burdekin cedes a central place in her critique to romantic conceptions of nature which are in turn focused on origin, no matter how fantastic or futurological her fiction.

To understand the political content of Burdekin's work therefore finally relies on her aesthetic valuation of myth. As stated in the introductory chapter, this book is written from a position that tries to operate against the foreclosing of (utopian) political possibility. Here, I contend that Burdekin's critique of fascism relies on a subtle critique of what Sayre and Löwy (1984) term "fascist romanticism" from a standpoint close to what they term a contrasting and progressive "utopian romanticism", albeit that in the context of science fictional and dystopian futures this utopian Romanticism is not without limitations. Examination of Burdekin's fiction can help us to interrogate the interstice of myth, ideology and politics. From here we can draw a more general lesson that the elevation of the pastoral to an aesthetic ideal carries political danger. Such romanticism requires careful negotiation in the study of both utopianism and political discourse more broadly.

### The four "Arch-fiends"

*Swastika Night* opens *in medias res* at a "Hitlerian" service within a swastika-shaped cathedral some 700 years into the future. Indirect discourse informs us of protagonist Hermann's attraction to a young choir boy with "long fair silky hair" (Burdekin 1985, 5), establishing the altered futurity of the story world, and the important religious nature of the foundational myth on which its dystopic society is based is established through a description of the symbolic importance of the cathedral to the Hitlerian creed.

The invocation of this creed at the novel's start positions the new Nazi religion as drawing upon structures and misogyny of existing Abrahamic faiths in addition to Germanic legends such as the High Middle German *Nibelungenlied*. The world which Burdekin's far-future Nazis have sought to establish resembles in some respects the pre-Lapsarian post-apocalyptic tradition of Richard Jefferies' *After London: Or, Wild England* (1885) in which a romantic nineteenth-century idealised image of Medieval courtly virtue underpins a society based on agricultural serfdom. The "Creed" names "Lenin... Stalin... Roehm [sic]... [and] Karl Barth" as the "*four arch-fiends, whose necks He set under His Holy Heel*" (6; emphasis in original), which suggests Jack London's *The Iron Heel* ([1908] 2006) as another intertextual reference.

The amalgamation of these varied sources and the focalisation through the point of view of a victorious future Nazism is estranging, and Burdekin's own position in relation to the forces opposing it is not clear until later on. Significantly, the imperial reach of this future Germany is uncomfortably close to that of Burdekin's contemporary Britain (a point reinforced later in the novel). Indeed, for Kate Holden (1999, 143), *Swastika Night* responds to a gendered English culture in which fascist impulses "[formed] part of the contradictory forces associated with early 20th century modernity" that writers like Virginia Woolf, Burdekin and Jean Rhys all "confronted and negotiated".<sup>4</sup> As Shaw (2000, 43) points out, in this reversal of the British imperial position Alfred occupies a "marginalised position as a member of a 'subject race'" and is thus "able to bring his own experience of oppression to bear in reading the [von Hess] document". This gendered victimisation of Alfred as an *English man* is central to the novel's political concerns. While two Englishmen (Alfred and his son) will play central roles in exploding the myths of the Hitlerian religion, the English are condemned historically for failing to provide any opposition of sufficient merit to warrant the rank of "arch-fiend" in Hitler's own day. This falls instead to two Germans – one of whom was a Nazi killed by his Party leader due to internal party politics rather than ideological opposition to Nazism – and two Bolsheviks.

Burdekin's own politics were of the left but heterodox. In the typescript of *No Compromise*, an unpublished and undated naturalist novel from around 1932–1933 held in her archive, Burdekin adopts a position consistent with being a fellow traveller, arguing for the essential justice of a socialist revolution. In the story world of *Swastika Night*, in which all history books have been destroyed, almost nothing is known about the "arch-fiends" Stalin and Lenin. When Von Hess explains to Alfred that the principle of "the home of Socialism" was workers' ownership of the means of production (as opposed to Nazi feudalism), he declares "then I am a Socialist" (Burdekin 1985, 79). Yet in the undated typescript *Children of Jacob*, (written at some point between the Anschluss and the Munich Agreement in 1938),<sup>5</sup> Burdekin expresses severe misgivings towards Soviet Communism through several characters including Chapman, a Party organiser who meets the protagonist Esau in a cafeteria some time around the (future) year 1942. Chapman tries to convince the spiritual Esau that love is at the heart of the Communists' desire for power, but he confesses that Esau's benefactor Nathan Solomons, the owner of an East End clothing factory, would be "left alone to get on as best he can" under Communist rule, and unable to even work in the factory he once owned (Burdekin Papers, *Children of Jacob* folder 2, 164–65). In this text, the Communist party provides the only viable opposition to Nazism, but it is severely restricted by its rigid materialist opposition to spiritual belief. Tempering this criticism, Soviet controversies of the 1930s such as show trials, the *Holodomor* famine in Ukraine and the internecine conflict in Spain are nowhere mentioned.

The inclusion of Ernst Röhm as one of two German "arch-fiends" is significant for two reasons: firstly, it demonstrates the importance of the internal

disciplining of the Party for the victory of "Hitlerism" in the future society. Secondly, Röhm was gay (a fact Hitler alluded to publicly after his death), and it must therefore be read as intentionally ironic that in *Swastika Night* women are relegated to the status of animals and male homosexuality is the only form of love socially acceptable, *especially* among Nazis. Throughout the novel Burdekin draws out the inner contradictions of Nazi ideology and myth in a similar vein.

The inclusion of Karl Barth as the final "arch-fiend" merits greater attention. Unlike Röhm, who had been a close comrade of Hitler since the early 1920s, Barth publicly opposed Nazism from early on. In 1934 he was lead writer of the Barmen Declaration, in which he and other ministers argued for the separation of Church and State, and sought to separate the myths of religious doctrine from the newer mythology of the Nazis' "Law of Nature". Barth and his colleagues specifically rejected "the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the State should and could become the sole and total order of human life and so fulfil the vocation of the Church as well", and in addition "the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the Church should and could take on the nature, tasks and dignity which belong to the State and thus become itself an organ of the State" (Barth and Asmussen 2017). The declaration represented the apotheosis of the "stiff opposition from the clergy and laity [which] forced the Nazis to abandon efforts by a splinter group that called itself *Deutsche Christen* (German Christians, DC) to impose an 'Aryan' theology on German Protestantism" (Orlow 2009, 43). The Barmen Declaration moreover marked a wider disagreement within German Protestantism about the relationship of Church and State, which the Weimar Constitution had overturned.

### Political religion and paligenetic myth

Before further examining Burdekin's treatment of Nazi ideology as theocratic it will be useful to unpack some key terms. The positioning of Nazism as expressly theocratic is in line with conceptions of "generic fascism" as being a political religion grounded in a paligenetic myth (i.e. a myth of the re-birth of a decadent society (see Griffin 1993)). Emilio Gentile (2005, 34) defines "political religion" as "a type of religion which sacralises an ideology, a movement or a political regime through the deification of a secular entity transfigured into myth, considering it the primary and indisputable source of the meaning and the ultimate aim of human existence on earth".<sup>6</sup> This argument tends to view "religion" in Eurocentric terms, and even (implicitly) through a Christian prism, but this does not prevent it from being useful for analysis of either Burdekin's work or Nazism within its national historical context. Burdekin's novel problematizes an assumption at one point common in the study of international politics that the Treaty of Westphalia marked a move from the temporality of Christian belief to the world order of nation states. As William Callahan (2006, 397) argues, "the nation is not a stable

thing... this contingent national community has to be continually invoked through public rituals". I suggest this is one reason why the novel opens with an account of a religious service in the Hitlerian cathedral. The "Holy German Empire" in *Swastika Night*, which echoes the Germanic "Holy Roman Empire" of the medieval and early modern periods, is a theocracy, and Burdekin clearly treats Nazism as a sacralised ideology in which an entity named "Hitler" (a seven foot blond god bearing no resemblance to the historical figure) has been deified. In order to maintain belief in this myth all books have been destroyed.

As fantastic as this sacralised ideology is, in the Western history of political thought there does exist a long tradition of promoting a *civic* religious or spiritual commitment to enable political action in support and defence of the community, and especially self-sacrifice. Roger Griffin points to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of a "civic religion" in *The Social Contract* as one of the first modern examples of the creation of a secular mythology intended to ensure that citizens will "care more for the city and for one another" and be prepared to sacrifice themselves for the community" (quoted in Griffin 2005, 12). As Griffin further notes, Rousseau drew on Plato's concept of a "royal lie" outlined in *The Republic* to make his case. Modern political religions take the mythologising of civic religion a step further: to Gentile (2005, 35), "the essential characteristic distinguishing 'political religion' from 'civil religion' is the extremist and exclusive nature of its historical mission".

This distinction is important because to state that Nazism is akin to a religion risks opening the door to the spurious claim that the reverse also holds true – that "religion" (writ large) is akin to Nazi politics. Such a position might be held cognate, for example, with the "rationalist critiques of faith expounded by evangelical atheists such as Christopher Hitchens (2008) and Richard Dawkins (2007)" (Adams 2016, 29). To avoid any possibility of confusion, I reject this position wholeheartedly. Following Bauman (1988) I regard modernity as a necessary but not sufficient condition to account for the rise of Nazism, whereas Hitchens, Dawkins, Sam Harris (2006) and others rely on positing religious faith (especially Islam) in opposition to the "liberal values of capitalist modernity" (Adams 2016, 29). Moreover, I want to avoid falling prey to the "myth of mythlessness" which Laurence Coupe identifies in Roland Barthes' work *On Mythologies* (1993; and see pp. 119–20). This is the false belief that it is possible for the critic to transcend mythical belief altogether and adopt a purely objective, rationalist stance in relation to it.

Looking beyond "the metaphysical dualism of Christianity", Griffin (2005, 15) views the sacralisation of politics as a hermeneutic construct instead of a metaphor, and which he bases on episodes of the history of Christian institutions such as the Spanish Inquisition. Griffin's Jungian declaration that, "the sacralisation of the State... is... to be treated as the product of the archetypal human faculty for imbuing the home, the community, and hence the new home and the new community, with suprahuman, ritual significance" (*ibid.*) sees religious movements as expressions of this faculty. Although useful to treat

political religion as a hermeneutic tool for comparative analysis of fascistic regimes, I find reliance on an “archetypal human faculty” to describe something explicitly connected to the thoroughly modern and contingent concept of the state less convincing. In the case of Germany especially, the issue is that Nazism relied on a conflation of the state and the nation. While “state” is a political-legal concept, the construct of “nation” is always-already mythical and hence open to sacralisation. In many places – not least Germany – the concept of the nation preceded the establishment of the modern state by centuries, albeit that the geographical territory of this nation was subject to frequent change. Even in the interwar period the geographic spaces in which people self-identified as “German” and the borders of the state of Germany did not wholly overlap. In this context, Jews could be excluded from the German *State* specifically because they did not “belong” to the racial myth of the German (Aryan) *Nation*. I argue that the German State was sacralised only insofar as it belonged to the (Nazi, mythical construct of the) German People. Hence, those “holy” places in *Swastika Night* to which Nazis and imperial subjects alike make their pilgrimages are sacred to the history of the nation rather than the state. Indeed, the twentieth-century concept of the state would be incomprehensible to the characters of Burdekin's story world as it is grounded in a period whose history has been obliterated.

This division between nation and state is not intended as a pedantic correction to terminological slippage, but rather as a means to focus the application of Griffin's core work on fascism to Burdekin's fiction. For Griffin (2005, 9), fascist ideology is built upon a paligenetic myth, according to which “the organically conceived nation is to be cleansed of decadence and renewed”. In *Swastika Night*, this myth has been long since fulfilled and it is precisely through the victory of Nazism that the poverty of its hollow promise to followers of the Nazi movement is revealed. As Von Hess puts it, “We are Germans. We are holy. We are perfect, and we are dead” (Burdekin 1985, 121). It is in this failure that the protagonist Alfred finds hope that the world – and especially life in England – could be different.

### Christians and Jews

In *Swastika Night* Nazism's total victory extends even to the destruction of the Bible. It is not only that books enable certain ideas to be passed around that can be dangerous to the regime, but as in Ray Bradbury's post-war dystopian classic *Fahrenheit 451* ([1953] 1957), the very act of reading implies an examination of life which is in and of itself heterodox (Stock 2015a, 66). In Burdekin's vision of Nazi total victory the Jews no longer exist and Christians are no longer “people of the Book”: Christianity has been fundamentally changed and corrupted to the point where the Christian character Joseph tells Alfred that “reading and writing are heathen. The truth must always be passed on by word of mouth” (Burdekin 1985, 176). Joseph is implacably opposed to Nazism as sinful, but his stance against them is pacifist:

'It is not for us to forgive *them*. We have not been told to forgive them, and disobeyed. We have not persecuted the Germans, nor offered them any violence. It is for God to forgive them, but *He will not*,' Joseph said very firmly. 'We have sinned, and they are the instruments of our punishment, but they are willing instruments, bloody and deceitful men'.

(1985, 176)

This is a perverse Christianity after its capitulation to a radical force of evil. Without the Bible to guide him, Joseph's knowledge of Christian theology is partial and inaccurate. Hearing this, Alfred, who has had the benefit of reading the forbidden von Hess book, thinks to himself, "I'm sure Joseph has all this Christianity muddled up. I *know* he has. He's a superstitious ignorant old Christian, and yet something of the real Jesus still reaches him" (1985, 179). Joseph believes that the Nazis were sent by God to persecute Christians because the Christians took it upon themselves to persecute the Jews following Christ's death at the hands of the Jews "through their leader... the Pontifical Pilot" (*ibid.*). The inaccurate name serves to underline the false nature of the charge.

Compromised as they are, these Christians clearly provide a religious opposition to that of the hegemonic Hitlerian religious force. Through allusion to Barth as an "arch-fiend" early in the text, Burdekin is able to set up a story world in which Christians are persecuted for their allegiance to religious powers outside of the Nazi religious state. As an illiterate group whose knowledge of the New Testament is corrupt to the point of being incommensurate with key points of Christian doctrine, they pose no discernable threat to the regime so long as the empire's other subjects treat them as outcasts.

The place of Christians in the narrative of *Swastika Night* is complex and involves a series of reflective manoeuvres between Christians of the future and Jews of the past. In the social organisation of the "Holy German Empire" of *Swastika Night*, a hierarchy of powerful Knights dominate the social structure, evoking a mythical medieval past. The Christians are placed in a social situation which mirrors that of medieval Jews: religious outsiders just barely tolerated and frequently subject to what are in effect blood libels and pogroms. Faced with the threat of Nazism in the mid 1930s, this othering of Christianity is a powerful rhetorical strategy, pursued from the first appearance of a Christian child as victim of attempted rape early in the text all the way through to the accepting of custodianship of the forbidden book at the novel's close.

The Jews were exterminated several centuries before the narrative commences in the external analeptic future-history of *Swastika Night*. Burdekin therefore effectively suggests both that the logic of Nazi antisemitism implies the Jews' eventual destruction, and that Nazism will subsequently need a new "Other" against which to define its sense of purity. At a basic level, Burdekin's speculation clearly raises the question, "what if Christians were a minority treated like the Jews have been historically in Europe?" The analogy is far from

straightforward, however, because if Christians are to become the Jews of the future then the Nazis of the future effectively become the Christians of the past. Yet persecution of European Jewry during the medieval and early Modern periods was expressly religious rather than “racial” in the modern sense, and was often sanctioned by Christian religious authorities. In the future “Holy German Empire” of *Swastika Night* it is the Nazi knights who hold this ecclesiastical position. Burdekin’s analogy therefore creates a direct temporal link between Christianity and Nazism. What starts out as a simple opposition of Christian versus Nazi on closer examination suggests a closer and potentially problematic mingling of racial and religious creed.

Von Hess tells Alfred that in the days of his ancestor who authored the forbidden book, “Germany was not Christian, it was without religion except devotion to Germany, and the subject races were for the main part only Christian because to be so was to be anti-German” (Burdekin 1985, 150). But the same character tells Alfred that “Hitler in his youth was a Christian himself” (1985, 72). In fact, although secularism had been on the rise since the German Enlightenment, Christianity was still a political force in 1930s Germany. Consistency is not a strength of the Von Hess forbidden book, but neither was it a strong point of Nazi ideology. Furthermore, Burdekin clearly knows that both the institutional and doctrinal history of Christianity is seriously compromised in the fight against fascism. Mediating between past and present, the invocation of Karl Barth as archenemy of the regime therefore doubly serves a Christ-like redemptive purpose: Barth saves Christianity from the past sins of Christendom against the Jews, and he redeems those strands of Christianity unmentioned in the novel which stood against him in complicity with the Nazi regime.

### Christianity and Nazism

In the final years of the Weimar Republic Hitler understood the electoral need to appeal to conservative Christian voters and “appealed to the church-going public by asserting that the liberal parliamentary state was not capable of defending either religion or the institutional rights of the churches” (Stackelberg 2007, 136). Hitler stressed the importance to the German “*Volk*” of both Protestantism and Catholicism in his first speeches upon becoming Chancellor, and although the Nazi support base was “overwhelmingly Protestant” by confession (Steigmann-Gall 2005, 86),<sup>7</sup> some Nazi leaders – including Hitler himself – were from a Catholic background. To improve their standing among practicing Christians, “both before and after the seizure of power, Nazi and SA groups frequently attended church in uniform” (Stackelberg 2007, 136).

Meanwhile, a significant faction of “Protestant Nazis and Nazi sympathizers” actively campaigned for closer alignment with the Nazis by helping “to form the movement of German Christians within a number of the 28 separately governed state churches in the late 1920s and early 1930s” (Stackelberg 2007, 137). From this base in the *Deutsche Christen*, the Nazis made their

first attempt to unify the separate state churches into a single German Protestant Church under their control following their electoral victory in 1933.

The attempt foundered when *Deutsche Christen* members attempted to introduce an "Aryan" clause into the Church constitution. This led directly to the establishment of a counter-movement known as the Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*), to which Karl Barth belonged. Confessing Church members opposed (to varying degrees) Nazi encroachment on church autonomy from a doctrinal position. Thus, although there were significant points of overlap between right-wing German Christian groups and the structures of the Nazi movement from the early 1930s onward, Heinsohn (2003, 55) explains that many Protestants "saw the absolute authoritarian principle [of Nazism] as incompatible with the ultimately divine order". For Shaw (2000, 45), "Hitler's aim was to recruit the existing structures of the Christian church to enforce allegiance to the fascist state, and in this women were to play an important role", and Heinsohn (2003, 39) indeed shows that "extreme right-wing women's groups were successfully absorbed by National Socialism". This is especially important in the context of *Swastika Night* because Burdekin strongly identifies Nazism as a masculinist ideology, and Von Hess tells Alfred that women were more than willing to submit to the atrocious conditions which followers of the zealot Von Wied demanded of them:

Once they were convinced that men really wanted them to be animals and ugly and completely submissive and give up their boy children for ever at the age of one year... they threw themselves into the new pattern with a conscious enthusiasm... They shaved their heads until they bled, they rejoiced in their hideous uniforms... they pulled out their front teeth until they were forbidden.

(Burdekin 1985, 82)

Such self-flagellation is in the historical context not precisely masochistic, but rather evidence of the internalisation of a *mythos* leading to acts of religious devotion. Even among the majority of Protestants who tried to stay neutral during these conflicts between "Confessing Church" and *Deutsche Christen*, "most believed the German *Volk* to be an 'order of creation' (*Schöpfungssordnung*). This doctrine was married to an all-too-prevalent German nationalism" (Probst 2009, 446). It is pertinent too that throughout the prevailing Protestant theology of the day antisemitism of varying shades was rife, albeit not universal.

After the failure of *Deutsche Christen* to unite and subsume Protestantism, the Nazis changed tack. From December 1935 they attempted "to reduce the influence of the churches among Germany's youth" by imposing mandatory service in the Hitler Youth for all children of ages ten to eighteen (Orlow 2009, 90). Concurrently, persecution of Christian opponents continued with questionable success, culminating in two successive trials of the head of the Protestant Confessing Church, Martin Niemöller, in 1937 and 1938. Niemöller was



sent to a concentration camp, which elicited widespread sympathy at home and abroad – including in Catholic France (Orlow 2009, 110–11).

In terms of Catholicism meanwhile, the Nazis achieved a major breakthrough in relations with the Vatican when they signed the *Reichskonkordat* in 1933 regulating the relationship between the German State and German Catholics. The agreement secured funding through religious taxes for the Church while limiting its influence elsewhere in German life. As with most of their foreign policy deals, the Nazi leadership viewed this as purely instrumental and they regularly broke its terms. In March 1937 (the year of *Swastika Night's* publication), Pope Pius XI issued the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (With Burning Concern), detailing Nazi violations of the *Reichskonkordat*. In response the Nazis put on a series of show trials of monks and clergymen for sexual misdemeanours, intended to drive a wedge between clergy and laity. As Dietrich Orlow (2009, 90) spells out, in this regard they failed, although the action did contribute to a developing atmosphere of anti-clericalism, veering toward the anti-Christian.

### Nazis and Christianity

Given *Swastika Night's* emphasis on religious belief, it is productive to read the novel in the context of public disputes with major religious institutions of Christianity in Germany. This is not, however, a straightforward task: within the “administrative confusion” that has led some historians to reject altogether the label of “totalitarianism” to describe the Nazi State in favour of Martin Broszat's term “polycracy” (see Stackelberg 2007, 61, 81, 122, 291), there existed a broad range of attitudes toward Christianity and religion, which also played into the context in which Burdekin wrote.

The relationship between Christianity and Nazism has been the subject of intense historical debate since the publication of Richard Steigmann-Gall's *The Holy Reich* (2003), in which he argues we should take at their word those Nazis who identified as Christian. In contrast to the arguments of Gentile, Griffin, and others that Nazism was a “political religion” (a thesis that fits Burdekin's presentation of Nazism too), Steigmann-Gall argues that the neo-Paganism and promotion of “Germanic tradition” fostered by the likes of Heinrich Himmler and Alfred Rosenberg was marginal within an NSDAP whose Protestant support base understood Nazism as wholly compatible with Christian belief (Steigmann-Gall 2005, 92).<sup>8</sup> Steigmann-Gall additionally points to members of the Nazi elite who professed to be Christian throughout the regime's existence. For example, in 1933 the Nazi Gauleiter of East Prussia Erich Koch served as elected president of the provincial Protestant church synod (Steigmann-Gall 2005, 97). Whatever their opinions on Christianity, it is surely significant that Rosenberg, Himmler and Hitler alike consistently attempted to “rescue Christ from his own Jewishness” (Steigmann-Gall 2005, 96), tying themselves in knots over supposed migration patterns in Classical Antiquity in order to give Christ an Aryan, antisemitic identity. Steigmann-Gall therefore argues that instead of

reading Nazism as a “political religion” we should analyse it as a “religious politics” in which “a political-secular movement takes on the temporal teachings of an established religion” (2005, 89).

Opposing this perspective, the understanding of Nazism upon which Burdekin relies excludes the possibility that Nazi ideologues could profess any genuine belief in Christianity. Her critical presentation of Nazism seems more closely related to the anti-Christian thinking of Nazis like Rosenberg and Himmler. In 1933 Rosenberg became head of the *Aussenpolitisches Amt* (Foreign Policy Bureau, APA). His book *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (*Myth of the Twentieth Century* (1930)) outlined a new Germanic faith to sacralise and support the Reich. Although it sold over a million copies by the late War years, it was never “endorsed by Hitler as the authoritative expression of Nazi ideology” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum 2017). In constructing his myth, Rosenberg leant heavily on the work of two nineteenth-century racist thinkers. The first of these was Arthur Comte de Gobineau, whose *Essai sur l'Inégalité des Races humaines* (1853–1855) Hannah Arendt (1966, 170) termed “a kind of standard work for race theories in history” from the turn of the twentieth century onward. Arendt asserts that Gobineau was the first to have sought a universal law, “one single reason, one single force according to which civilization always and everywhere rises and falls”. The answer the French aristocrat hit upon to explain the fall of civilization, (especially the loss of power of his own class), was that “a degeneration of race and the decay of race is due to a mixture of blood. This implies that in every mixture the lower race is always dominant” (Arendt 1966, 172–73). From this work Rosenberg adapted the development of a branch of the Aryan “race” vanquished but not destroyed by Caesar and of unusual purity.

While Gobineau saw races as becoming more “polluted” over time, the second of Rosenberg’s sources Houston Stewart Chamberlain, an English Germanophile and son-in-law to Richard Wagner, claimed to show how gradual improvements to a race could be made in his *Die Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts* (1890–91) (Coyne 1935, 179). Building on these two writers, and adding a Sorelian understanding of the utility of myth for mobilising populations, Rosenberg went one step further. Inverting cause and effect with convenient illogicality, he called for the establishment of a new Germanic faith by reading the principles of its emergence as already in place. The book was placed on the Catholic Church’s index of prohibited books on 7 February 1934, condemned for outlining, “the need of instituting a new religion or German church, and formulat[ing] the principle that to-day a new mythical faith is arising, a mythical faith of blood based on the belief that the divine nature of man can be defended by a faith founded on the most exact science” (Quoted in Coyne 1935, 178).

Rosenberg’s mythology is Janus-faced. On the one hand, it follows Gentile’s dictum that fascists saw materialism as “the defining feature of both capitalism and communism”, whereas they “extolled the values of the spirit” (Gentile 1974, quoted in Gentile 2005, 45).<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, Rosenberg claims to

combine the mystical and the scientific. In the paligenetic core of the Nazi *Weltanschauung*, combining the pseudo-scientific fetishisation of “blood” with the pseudo anti-materialist myth of rebirth, the Nazis saw Jews as both pollutants (of blood) and the *material* cause of capitalism and communism alike. In Griffin’s words, “the Nazis saw the advent of their movement in history as a cosmological act of creating a new society with a new *Weltanschauung* through the intervention of an inspired *propheta* in a national act of self-creation” (Griffin 2007, 258). The historical liquidation of Jews in the far future of *Swastika Night* indicates that even in 1937 Burdekin correctly saw this as a priority for the Nazis. In her subsequent unpublished manuscript *Children of Jacob*, which explored contemporary persecution of Jews across Europe, Burdekin anticipated Theodor Adorno’s argument in his much later qualitative psychological study of ideology for *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) that, “anti-Semitic [sic] writers and agitators from Chamberlain to Rosenberg and Hitler have always maintained that the existence of the Jews is the *key* to everything” (Adorno et al. 1982, 311). Burdekin also grasped that whatever differences individual Nazis had in their approaches to racial history, violent action against all Jews lay at the paranoid core of the Nazi worldview.

Rosenberg’s influence in the Nazi Party internally and in policy terms has been subject to debate. For Orlow (2009, 20), he was “a notoriously poor infighter who lost virtually all of his battles with other Nazi officials”. But Irving Hexham (2007, 72) points to Hitler granting Rosenberg the new German National Prize for Art and Science in 1937 as an example of Hitler’s appreciation of his work. In public Hitler tended to distance himself from Rosenberg’s views, though he did not prevent Rosenberg from promulgating them. By contrast, Rosenberg’s rival Heinrich Himmler was a savvier political operator. For example, as head of the SS Himmler played a leading role in the “Night of the Long Knives” (June 1934), when the “arch-fiend” Ernst Röhm was arrested and shot (see Orlow 2009, 42). For Himmler, this ensured that the SA could never threaten the SS as an armed force. In the creation of a Nazi mythology, in some respects Himmler went further than Rosenberg, both by codifying a set of ritual practices directly comparable with those of Christianity, and by developing a more detailed spurious “Germanic” mythology. According to Himmler’s biographer Peter Longerich (2012, 288), he developed for the SS “diverse ceremonies, from birth and marriage ceremonies to burial rites. His stipulations for these were very detailed”. He established “cultural foci” such as “the burial-place of Henry I of Quedlinburg on the eastern border of the Harz mountains” and the SS base in Wewelsberg castle as “holy places” (Longerich 2012, 294). In addition, Himmler commissioned dozens of studies and archaeological digs into German prehistory. In 1935 he established German Ancestral Heritage (*Deutsches Ahnenerbe*) to “support the SS’s ideological indoctrination programmes with publications on Germanic prehistory and in the field of genealogy” (Longerich 2012, 276).

In Himmler’s ideology, the historic mission of National Socialism was to win the struggle for survival between the Germanic People and “subhuman”

groups. However, Longerich argues that in contrast to Rosenberg and Hitler, Himmler presented Jews as a curiously “insipid” enemy in his speeches because they were the “string-pullers and the intellectual gurus” behind freemasonry and communism as well as (somehow) Christianity. In his early years as a Nazi, Himmler “maintained a strong Catholic piety” (Steigmann-Gall 2003, 106). Even later, Himmler would continue to assert that Jesus was not Jewish and while “his basic characterization of Jesus as the great antisemite [sic] would remain unaltered” he would “profess hatred for Christianity” (Steigmann-Gall 2003, 107). Longerich (2012, 262) concurs that his “rhetoric took flight when he was speaking against communists, homosexuals, and above all against Christianity”.

It is tempting to look to Himmler as a source for mythology in *Swastika Night*. The “Teutonic Knights” who serve both ritual and political functions are clearly descendants of the SS. The importance of German “holy places”, to which Alfred is travelling on “pilgrimage” in the opening chapters of the book is also a Himmlerian idea. Yet this is a less likely direct source than Rosenberg. *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* was not officially translated into English during his lifetime, but it was reviewed in English language publications and his writings were frequently referred to in the English press. Moreover, Alfred Rosenberg had undertaken an official visit to Britain in 1933. It was marred by protests and *The Manchester Guardian* reported on 12 May that a member of the British Legion had been fined for throwing the swastika wreath Rosenberg laid at the Cenotaph on behalf of Hitler in the Thames.<sup>10</sup> Commentator J. L. Garvin’s leader on the incident in *The Observer* two days later stated, “the hooked cross [i.e. swastika] is the antithesis of the Christian Cross... the barbaric blazon of his party-cult”. For the British press the visit was full of blunders rather than provocations, but either way Rosenberg’s on-going disputes with the Catholic Church made for good copy: *The Observer* gleefully reported on 19 September 1937 that the Pope had described Rosenberg as “a self-styled prophet”, and when the Vatican banned his *Myths of the Twentieth Century*, on 18 February 1934 *The Guardian* told readers that although Rosenberg stated the text comprised

Personal ideas and not ones connected with the party programme to which he belongs, it is also nevertheless true that this book is constantly advertised in the official National-Socialist Press, is in every German bookshop window, and belongs to what one might call ‘required reading’ of all faithful party members.

Rosenberg was highly visible internationally, his interminable tome portrayed as “required reading” for Nazi ideologues. By way of contrast, Longerich stresses that although Himmler was deadly serious (if sometimes cynically instrumentalising) about his neo-Pagan beliefs, he time and again stressed to SS leaders the need to be secretive about the foundations of an SS cult, as “he feared not only ridicule from the public, but in particular Hitler’s negative attitude with regard

to a too pronounced revival of the Germanic heritage" (Longerich 2012, 293). Indeed, according to Steigmann-Gall (2003, 131), "Hitler even approached Himmler himself in 1935, fully rejecting the foundation of a new religion, calling it a 'chimera'. Rather than attack Himmler frontally, however, he took the indirect route of attacking Himmler's paganist ally Rosenberg, stating that he intended to take action against Rosenberg's *Mythus*."

Himmler proceeded cautiously and slowly in the de-Christianizing of the SS. Steigmann-Gall (2003, 221) states that, "for a radical anti-clerical, he demonstrated a remarkable degree of flexibility, continually insisting that the SS men who chose to remain active Christians had every right to do so". This capacity for patient plotting may be a reason for Himmler's greater relative success within the NSDAP vis-à-vis Rosenberg: as head of the SS Himmler's career moved in a sustained trajectory from the early 1930s right through the War, eventually replacing Frick as Reich Interior Minister.

### Fascism, myth and technology

Burdekin's presentation of Nazism as a political religion uses the mythic core of paligenetic renewal in order to craft a presentation of an arcane and stagnant philosophy, the logic of whose tenuous grip on a decadent empire requires technological regression and the retreat from every major material improvement of modernity to the lives of Europeans. Airplanes, cars, radios and other technologies useful to warfare are frequently alluded to, but the only twentieth-century consumer technology mentioned in the novel is the pre-rolled cigarette.<sup>11</sup> Other such technologies (for example, the cinema) are noticeable by their absence, seemingly obliterated with the memory of the pre-Nazi past and – importantly – the female consumer.<sup>12</sup> Taken to its logical conclusion, Burdekin suggests, the Nazi myth of re-birth requires the extinction of any knowledge of pre-Nazi civilisation.

This leads Burdekin into a difficult situation because notwithstanding setbacks resulting from the Great Depression, Germany was a major manufacturing country throughout the 1930s. Furthermore, as Mark Antliff (2002) shows, the regime's propaganda frequently celebrated strong industrial and agricultural production. Griffin (2007, 256) goes as far as to claim that in its "blend of the primordial with the hypermodern", Nazism represents a form of "modernism", and while there were differences of opinion across the party, both the yearning for a mythical pre-modern past and the "desire to make Germany the most advanced technological nation on earth" were clearly evident in its actions. In Antliff's (2002, 148) words, "espousing blood and soil tribalism even as it constructed autobahns, engineered the Volkswagen, and developed advanced methods of factory organization, the Nazi regime ... looked to both a mythic past and a technological future". We may conclude that even as it attempts to murderously fulfil a mythological racist prophecy, fascism is *only* possible in an industrialised, modern society.

How, then, are readers supposed to understand this fictional Nazi future which, for all its terrors, is set in the bucolic fields and forests of rural England and Germany? If the industrial centres in which the majority of the population in 1930s Germany lived are absent (or at least never ventured into) in Burdekin's novel, does this imply an oversight on Burdekin's part, a shortcoming in her understanding of fascism as a specifically modern phenomenon? I suggest that Burdekin's awareness of the links between Nazism, modern industry, and capitalism can be found instead in the text's recognition that war is an economic imperative for the Nazi regime. For this to be the case the industries necessary to produce bombs, guns, trucks, airplanes and so on must presumably still be in existence, and significantly the protagonist Alfred is an aeroplane mechanic.

### Social conditions

Neither the urban economic base of the Nazi's empire nor the central structures of government are dwelt on in *Swastika Night*. Perhaps due to their ancestral *Fuhrer*-worship, there is no living tyrant to whom the network of technocratic knights yields unquestioning obedience. In comparison to dystopias such as Jameson's *In the Second Year* and Huxley's *Brave New World*, Burdekin's novel stands out for its concentration on the social implications of the rise of fascism from below, rather than examining the views and intentions of governmental leaders like Jameson's Frank Hillier or Huxley's Mustapha Mond.

Burdekin's interest in the social implications of fascism can also be seen in her unpublished typescript *Children of Jacob* (1938). This novel tells the story of Glyn Morgan, a shopkeeper of Welsh descent from Glastonbury, who has just returned from an unfortunately timed holiday, where he had "heard hundreds of aeroplanes and seen thousands of soldiers" from Germany enter Austria during the Anschluss (Burdekin Papers, *Children of Jacob* folder 1, 2). The book follows Glyn's fantastical travels through time and space accompanied by a guardian spirit, during which he is successively transformed into three different incarnations of the Biblical character Esau: first in an alternative reality re-writing of the Biblical story of Jacob and Esau set in Glastonbury Tor; then in the guise of a working-class German Jew in a near-future London (1942); and finally in a short section set in a utopian future where nations and nuclear families no longer exist. During the 1942 section, a Jewish clothing factory owner tells the protagonist,

Rearmament is practically finished. All the countries are bursting with arms, but none of them, or perhaps I should say, because of it, none of them quite dare to start a war. Many of the countries are trying to be self-sufficient in case of war, and foreign trade's drying up. Soon they'll have to start turning men off from the munition factories and unemployment will jump. Purchasing power will be lowered and there'll be the devil of a slump. A slump like nothing that's ever been seen. People will be starving,

and then there's bound to be one of three things, war, or Fascist revolution, or Communist revolution.

(Burdekin Papers, *Children of Jacob* folder 1, 115)

While we might quibble over the veracity of some of the individual claims, the main meat of these predictions is fairly common fare for the late 1930s (as indeed we have seen with Storm Jameson's *In the Second Year* in the previous chapter). The political crisis of the period is here set out as being primarily the result of economic forces. But whereas Jameson's allegorical novel responds with an investigation of the political scheming of the fascist Prime Minister and his inner coterie, Burdekin's novel is more interested in investigating the social implications of fascism as a populist force from the bottom up. The formal politics of government barely get a look in. The thrust of the novel is to argue that political movements alone cannot defeat fascism: successful anti-Nazi resistance requires a spiritual as well as a political dimension, which should begin from a fundamental revaluation of gender relations. To paraphrase Max Horkheimer, Burdekin effectively argues that whoever does not wish to talk about gender should also be quiet about fascism.

### Gender, sexology and inversion

The presentation of gender in *Swastika Night* should be seen in the wider context of Burdekin's esoteric model of gender, sex and sexuality. Burdekin was interested in the sexual inversion theory of Havelock Ellis, and was put in touch with him by the modernist poet H. D. (Hilda Doolittle). Four letters from the ensuing correspondence between Burdekin and Ellis dated 1934–1937 are held in the Burdekin archive, and Elizabeth English (2015, 38ff.) gives a thorough and detailed account of their significance. Ellis recommended Burdekin's novels to colleagues and friends, and offered “wholehearted approval of her work, and in particular of *Proud Man*” (English 2015, 38).

In *Proud Man* ([1934] 1993), an androgynous telepathic vegan from the far-future travels to the authorial present through a consciously wished-for “dream”, echoing the parallel universe of H. G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia* (2005a).<sup>13</sup> “The Person”, as the protagonist is first labelled (they subsequently adopt other names in the text as their gender identity changes), wishes to visit “subhumans” who live in a “transitional state” between the animal and the (fully) human, “half-conscious but not fully conscious; able to speak and write, but not able to communicate clearly by thought alone; and in a state of confusion as to the true relation of the self to the not-self” (Burdekin 1993, 15).<sup>14</sup> The Person lives first as a woman, and then as a man, in close quarters with a series of these “subhuman” English people from the 1930s present.

From the vantage point of fully developed humanity, the Person is able to give meaning to the multitudinous failings of the “sub-humans” of the present, although their presentation of the world of the authorial present is cognitively estranged as partial, fragmented, and alienated. The Person lives with

a series of characters including a deist Catholic priest who disbelieves his creed, a feminist novelist who struggles against social mores to remain independent, and a sociopathic serial child-killer.

Havelock Ellis's praise for the novel is interesting given that the transformations which the Person undertakes implicitly question some of the assumptions about gender and sexuality on which Ellis and other sexologists relied. On the one hand, the "subhumans" whom the Person visits are all unhappily neurotic or psychotic largely because of their inability to conform to gender norms, and this accords with Ellis's views. As English explains, since the work of lawyer and homosexual rights campaigner Heinrich Ulrichs in the 1860s, the prevailing view in sexology understood homosexuality "as a congenital identity", caused by an "erroneous assignment of soul to body". Such a model of sexuality relied upon a "traditional, and conservative notion of gender behaviour, and, essentially, a heteronormative blueprint of desire to explain and justify homosexuality". For Ellis, Krafft-Ebbing and others, "sexual difference was both visible and tangible". Rejection of traditional gendered roles and appearances was evidence of sexual difference (English 2015, 36). On the other hand, the androgynous Person from the future defies gender categorisation as they are wholly androgynous, and effectively negate sexual desire altogether. The connections they seek with others are more spiritual and emotional than physical. This manoeuvre implicitly accepts the linking of sexuality and gender proposed by Ellis, but it also rejects heteronormativity as an ahistorical human category: in a utopian future, both gender *and* sexual desire are negated through the fulfilment of evolutionary potential.<sup>15</sup>

Burdekin's view of gender and sexuality is therefore problematically tied to contemporary sexology yet radical in its implications where she does reach beyond it. Discussing *The Person in Proud Man* alongside the protagonist Grania in another of Burdekin's 1930s utopian texts *The End of This Day's Business* (first published 1989), English (2015, 46) argues that effectively, "the Person and Grania simultaneously occupy utopian and lesbian subject-positions, and they are constructed using a language very much rooted in Burdekin's present moment and in popular sexual discourses". Both of these characters reject physical passion in favour of emotional bonds. As English contends, her "focus on lesbian and gay love as a spiritual and emotional bond" effectively "mutes homosexual passion". This is not merely "self-loathing" on Burdekin's part, it is also connected to contemporary sexological discourse. Hence this "serves to remind us that sexology's theory of inversion is, to a certain extent, a theory of gender dysphoria rather than just desire" (2015, 50). Of greater importance to the present discussion, Burdekin's engagement with gender and sexuality – especially with lesbian sexuality – explicitly links political consciousness to gender and sexual orientation. While Burdekin does not sufficiently distinguish between lesbianism and the sexual invert, given the important dysphoric dimension to the latter it is of crucial importance that Burdekin "positions the invert as an agitator, capable of instigating social change and pushing forward the evolution of the species" (English 2015, 47).



If lesbian sexuality has the potential to be liberating and socially progressive, then the total denial of female sexuality *tout court* in *Swastika Night*, in which rape is institutionalised as the sole means of reproduction, demonstrates its social importance for a functioning society. As a result of the treatment of women, the novel suggests, the male birth rate has dropped to unsustainably low levels. With a nod to the (far more positive) portrayal of asexual reproduction in Charlotte Perkin Gilman's *Herland* ([1915] 1999) in which a tribe of women create a harmonious single-sex utopia, Burdekin's dystopian novel features women who, denied human agency, can only reproduce daughters (who will in turn lack agency).<sup>16</sup> The hyper-masculine ideology of Hitlerism ultimately guarantees its own self-destruction.

In the context of this toxic hyper-masculinity English reads the promotion of male homosexuality among subjects of the Empire "as a natural extension of male dominance in its worship of masculinity and denigration of women", because in contrast to the intertwined nature of sexual inversion and gender norms for women, "male inversion is clearly not aligned to gender violence in the same way that male homosexuality is, and while inversion can include same-sex desire, for Burdekin it is by no means synonymous with homosexuality" (English 2015, 51). While this is certainly true of the Nazi hierarchy in the novel, the critical thrust of the novel's narrative is based in significant part on a homoerotic bond between Alfred and Hermann, which is the basis of a queer relationship. In Burdekin's story world this *queerness* is risky, if not wholly prohibited, as it crosses the line between German and non-German and as such contains the seed of opposition. Indeed it is when Hermann is pushed into exile and disgrace that the bond, now expressly prohibited, becomes more expressly political too. In order for this to happen, Hermann must give up his Nazi status, and his privileged place in the Nazi mythological order.

### Myth, ideology, utopia

For Burdekin, the wellspring of the modern world's problems is spiritual. She views political religions such as fascism as mythological developments with ideological implications and not the other way around. Such developments are a perversion of the true value that Burdekin believes myth can have, both for literature and for the creation of a utopian politics, and her work can help us to interrogate the interrelated concepts of myth, ideology and utopia, which are central to the manner in which cultural representations help to form political discourse.

In Roland Barthes' structuralist classic *Mythologies* (1993, first published in French 1957), he reads myths as a bourgeois form of "depoliticized speech" which can be treated as more or less interchangeable with a somewhat restricted conception of ideology (Coupe 2009, 147–48). As Laurence Coupe notes, such an approach risks engaging in what he terms the "myth of mythlessness" (2009, 9), whereby criticism somehow transcends the mystifying

forces that are conditions of its own production (2009, 148). Here Chiara Bottici's (2007, 178) insistence that (political) myth "is a narrative that answers a need for significance" is useful in signposting the importance of form: whereas ideology in Barthes' sense signifies stories and especially *images* of the world which seek to explain it, myth is *always* a narrative means by which to explore the world (see Coupe 2009, 87–88). When we call a figure, sign, or belief "mythic", (e.g. Himmler's use of SS runes) we are effectively saying it can be fitted into a mythic narrative. "By means of a synecdoche, any object or gesture – a painting, an image, a song, a film, an advertisement, a gesture – can recall the whole work on myth that lies behind it" (Bottici 2007, 181–82). Moreover, while the mythic can be ideological, an interpretive act is required to use such stories to explain the world as it is.

Ideology can and frequently does tell the sort of story "that justifies the existence and beliefs of the [social] group" (Sargent 2008, 268), but this is only one of its functions. Nor is ideology limited to narrative modes of expression. On the contrary, Sargent's Ricoeurian description of legitimating *stories* could be used more precisely as a definition of political myths. Such myths are of necessity ideological, but "ideology" covers far more besides. Using "myth" *only* to cover such stories frees up the term "ideology" for a broader, less rigid definition that, as Raymond Williams (2005, 31–32) argues, speaks to the determining relationships of both base and superstructure, social being and consciousness. Glossing Williams' argument, Ruth Levitas (1990, 77) finds that while Paul Ricoeur and Karl Mannheim both treat society "as a totality consisting of symbolic and cultural as well as economic practices", Williams helps us to understand that "only by simultaneously using Gramsci's concept of hegemony is it possible to grasp both the class character of society and the role of ideas, meanings and values, within an essentially dynamic social process". This is to say that if, as Terry Eagleton (1991, 19) has it, ideology comprises performative utterances that serve to legitimate existing social relations, such utterances are also dynamic, reflecting and responding to changes within the social process.

To distinguish between myth and utopia, meanwhile, Levitas turns to the surprising congruence between two otherwise divergent thinkers, namely Georges Sorel and Karl Mannheim, for whom, "both myth and utopia are defined in terms of their transformative function, although utopia transforms society in its own image while myth merely mobilises people to effect a transformation; the myth is mobilising but not anticipatory, while utopia is both" (Levitas 1990, 82).

In his introduction to Sorel's *Reflections on Violence*, Jeremy Jennings (2004, xiii) states that Sorel derived his concept of myth from his reading of Henri Bergson's work on the workings of the mind "during a creative moment", when we achieve a "new form of comprehension... identified as 'intuition', a form of internal and empathetic understanding that Sorel believed was encompassed by his category of myth." For Sorel, the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie through the act of general strike is the central "mythical form" of Marxism,

and Jennings credits Sorel with being “amongst the first in France to read Marx seriously” (2004, x). Such a myth “operates intuitively rather than intellectually” and it should be judged in terms of how it may “facilitate action” rather than in terms of “empirical accuracy” (Levitas 1990, 65). As Jennings (in Sorel 2004, xiii–xiv) puts it, “those who live in the world of myths are ‘secure from all refutation’ and cannot be discouraged. It is therefore through myths that we understand ‘the activity, the sentiments and the ideas of the masses as they prepare themselves to enter on a decisive struggle’”.

If Sorel praised myth for the effectiveness of its non-rationality, Mannheim (1960, 82) criticised myth for running “the risk of overlooking whatever important lessons history has to offer”, and for preventing individuals from developing “a self-consciousness in themselves which will stand firm even when the individual is cut off from the mode of judgment peculiar to his group” (1960, 32). This essentially Kantian criticism of myth would be criticised in turn by Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse and others for its rationalistic faith in Enlightenment thought.<sup>17</sup> For Mannheim (1960, 86), myths are stupefying to the masses because they are examples of “ideological distortion” which serve to falsify “the elementary facts of human existence by deifying, romanticizing or idealizing them, in short, by resorting to the device of escape from themselves and the world”. Subsuming myth within a model of ideology as a distorting veil that “in all cases... is concerned with something hidden” (Sargent 2008, 265), Mannheim defines both ideology and utopia in terms of their social function. Levitas explains that for Mannheim utopia and ideology are “ideas which are ‘incongruous with’ and transcend the reality within which they occur, being orientated towards objects which do not exist in the actual situation. The difference is that ideologies operate to sustain the existing state of affairs, while utopias operate to change it” (Levitas 1990, 68).

Mannheim’s position here seems to overlook the cohesive role of myth: in Bottici’s (2007, 183) words, “political myths, having to ground (*begründen*) always-changing circumstances, must be open to change” to ensure cohesion continues. Myth, in other words, is highly adaptable and can be deployed even when circumstances in the existing state of affairs change. This weakness in Mannheim’s position is compounded when having decried myth and “mysticism” for promoting passive and undifferentiated acceptance of the status quo, Mannheim then reads Chiliasm as demanding a “breaking through into a qualitatively different kind of existence” (Levitas 1990, 71). He therefore positions Chiliasm as one of four types of utopia (the others being liberal-humanist; conservative; and socialist-communist). The use value of utopia here is effectively in resisting the closure of ideology, and so myth becomes a force that operates both to foreclose change and (through Chiliasmic utopia) opens the future towards it.

We can find a way through the impasse, however, by turning to the treatment of ideology and utopia in Burdekin’s fiction. For Burdekin, utopia does indeed have a spiritual element, and it provides the method by which life can be imagined as radically other, especially in terms of gender and sexuality.

English reads Burdekin's "utopian project for sexuality" (2015, 52) as imbued with the sexological theory of inversion in which homosexuality is to a certain extent treated as evidence of "gender dysphoria and transgenderism" (2015, 51). Unlike Havelock Ellis, who hoped to see homosexuality widely accepted as natural, Burdekin posits an evolution in the constructions of gender, sex, and sexuality. English is surely correct that Burdekin's project is to "strive towards an existence of a higher order" where the "emotions and passions" connected to current sexual relations "are irrelevant. Burdekin essentially reconceptualises and re-envision[s] the very nature of sexuality by striving towards what she believes to be the ideal of sexual identity, based not upon carnality but spirituality" (English 2015, 52).

In works like *Proud Man*, *The End of this Day's Business*, and *Children of Jacob* the centrality of a reconfiguration of gender and sexual norms to utopian alterity is striking. The argument Burdekin presents across these diverse imaginaries is that for the world to be ruled by a fully "human", non-alienated species at ease with itself requires a fundamental transformation in how we think about the very notion of "humanity" as characterised by binary heteronormative gender relations. The god-like time-travelling "Person" in *Proud Man* is willing to adopt whatever gender identity the humans with whom they live want them to perform, in order for those same characters to gain self-knowledge (albeit that, as members of a species called humanity which is yet to fully self-realise itself, they cannot achieve the same level of self-knowledge and realisation as the Person themselves). They appear to present-day characters as a blank slate on to which any psychological and emotional needs can be projected. This is because in the Person's future, the constricting concept of binary gender has been utterly negated, and biological sex is no longer determining or even determined. Yet the slate is not blank; it is inscrutable. If myth answers a need for significance and ideology serves as a performative discourse of legitimisation, the utopian Person transcends both by virtue of their orientation as a visitor to the present from an alterity so different it cannot be fully assimilated into contemporary understanding.

*Swastika Night* uses a somewhat different although by no means oppositional narrative strategy to texts with utopian sections such as *Proud Man*. In contrast to Burdekin's utopian presentation of gender evolution, *Swastika Night* is concerned with what will happen if humanity slips further into the regressive dead end of hyper-masculine fascism. The net result of the completed transformation is an atrophy whereby even Nazis recognise (to quote again Von Hess's words), "We are Germans. We are holy. We are perfect, and we are dead" (Burdekin 1985, 121). It is only by casting themselves in the mythic light of heroes in the epic narrative form of tragedy that Von Hess, his ancestor, and other Germans who oppose Hitlerism can explain their world.

Ironically, the self-image of both Von Hess and Alfred's opposition to Hitlerism is in a few key respects similar to the tragic hero narrative of the cult itself. The Hitlerian nature myth involves the return of the god Hitler to his father, God the Thunderer and a re-birth of the German nation. The Von Hess

myth involves a line of tragic heroes passing on the forbidden book with its fragments of truth, in the hope of someday igniting a renaissance in Western culture and freedom that harks back to pre-twentieth-century times. The utopian dream for which Alfred yearns involves a form of non-coercive freedom beyond the imaginative scope of his present society (based upon a new model of gender so radically different he cannot begin to imagine its full ramifications), but he struggles at times to avoid the patriarchal nationalistic myths of the British Empire: when Von Hess tells him about the existence of such an empire in the distant past, his reaction is a triumphant “Ha!” (Burdekin 1985, 77). All of these myths are ideological. All of them cast their believers in the role of anointed actors whose actions are required to ensure a re-birth of the world in one or another form. Alfred’s mythical narrative stands out simply because he creates it as a means to make his genuinely utopian desires comprehensible (primarily to himself) in a world of extreme misogyny.

### Fascism, romanticism, utopia

The importance afforded to myth in Burdekin’s work echoes its use by modernist writers such as T. S. Eliot, H. D. and James Joyce. In *Swastika Night*, the religious cult from which Burdekin’s critique of Nazism proceeds is built around an absurd re-imagining of Hitler as a heroic mythical figure *and* a god of fertility. This treatment of Nazi myth is ironic, but it shows an engagement with anthropology comparable to that of Eliot’s 1922 poem *The Waste Land*. (In his endnotes to the poem, Eliot credited anthropologist Jessie Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) with being responsible for “not only ‘the title’, but also ‘the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism’” within it (Eliot 1961, 68; and see Coupe 2009, 25)). We know from letters she exchanged with Havelock Ellis that Burdekin was a reader of anthropologist Otto Rank (English 2015, 38), and the emphasis upon the mythical heroism of Hitler in *Swastika Night* may be in part an engagement with his theories. If true, this would represent the sort of ironic inversion which Burdekin relished performing: in arguing for the importance of childhood relationships with parental figures in foundation myths, one of Rank’s case studies is the Israelite leader Moses (Segal 1999, 124).

Although Burdekin engages with anthropological theories of myth, in both *Swastika Night* and *Children of Jacob* there are inconsistencies in her use of it: at times myth is instrumentalised as a force for good (something closer to utopia), while elsewhere when more politically convenient it becomes an impediment to logical and rational analysis (something closer to Mannheim’s conception of ideology). Thus in *Swastika Night* the non-rationality of Nazi mythology veils an expressly logical truth about both gender and national identity. Alfred is able to see through the “very muddling” (Burdekin 1985, 107) contemporary situation even though “everything’s fantastic if it’s out of the lines you’re brought up on” (1985, 98). Mythology is the edifice which must be torn down, but Alfred and Von Hess share a series of romantic sentiments

relating to nature, the sublime, and the autonomous individual which are no less mythic. As the Knight puts it, "Great men, in their loneliness, might touch one another", and while living in England in such a situation his ancestor who wrote the forbidden book, "began to understand about God. Not Hitler, not the god of the Germans, but about God, whatever God is... it came and went like the best part of the sunset" (1985, 87). Burdekin expresses such mystical deism throughout her work, and it is through this spiritual change that she believes her utopian reconfiguration of gender and sexuality can be achieved. In Burdekin's use of myth we see the competing influences of romanticism and modernism, often held in tension.

It is important to note here that like fascism (and indeed modernism),<sup>18</sup> romanticism can be defined by a set of contradictory impulses. Sayre and Löwy (1984, 43) observe that even a single romantic work can seem to be "at the same time (or alternately) revolutionary and counter-revolutionary, cosmopolitan and nationalist, realist and fanciful, restorationist and utopian, democratic and aristocratic, republican and monarchist, red and white, mystical and sensual". Examining romanticism as an anti-capitalist *Weltanschauung* (worldview) that finds expression both in politics and cultural forms, they point to the unifying feature across all forms of romanticism first identified in Marxist scholarship, namely, "*opposition to capitalism in the name of pre-capitalist values*" (1984, 46 emphasis in original). Sayre and Löwy do not hold such "romantic anti-capitalism" to be the exclusive preserve of the right and fascism, arguing it can alternatively (or additionally) contain revolutionary elements. Hence, for example, Henri Lefebvre used romanticism as a means to construct a utopian critique of the production of space under the contemporary capitalism of his day (see Coleman 2015, 18–34). Noting the "deliberately *non-realistic*" nature of many romantic and neo-romantic texts which dream "of *another world*, quintessentially opposed to bourgeois society", Sayre and Löwy coin the term "critical unrealism" in order "to designate the creation of an imaginary, ideal, utopian or fantasy universe radically opposed to the grey, prosaic and inhuman reality of industrial capitalist society" that may be found in such texts (1984, 49). I argue Burdekin's work falls into this category.

As dystopian fictions which critically engage with the political life of the 1930s by creatively using myth meanwhile, Katharine Burdekin's novels also set about a process of "making strange" the everyday and thereby investing it with what Antonis Balasopoulos (2014, 281) terms the "transcendental potential" of modernism. Contradictory though this doubtlessly is, for readers of modernist texts such as Virginia Woolf's fantasy biography *Orlando* ([1928] 2008) this should not seem especially unusual. Instead, this tension should help us to further specify the type of romanticism which Burdekin exhibits.

Burdekin presents Nazism as romantic in a reactionary and masculinist sense; as an example of that which Sayre and Löwy term "fascist Romanticism" (1984, 61). Following Sayre and Löwy's schema, I argue that she does so from a position we may label *Utopian romanticism*. This is to say that Burdekin understands Nazism as a romantic reaction against the capitalist failures of the

post-World War I settlement, and that for her while romanticism is not necessarily fascistic, fascism is necessarily romantic insofar as it focuses on a mythical pre-Capitalist racial purity. Burdekin's view of Nazi ideology is therefore cognate with Sayre and Löwy's description of it as "thoroughly nostalgic: for the old tribal and feudal Germany, for traditional peasant life in opposition to the frenzied pace of the big city, for the ancient *Gemeinschaften* [communities] in contrast with today's *Gesellschaft* [society]" (1984, 70). She opposes Nazism through an alternative spiritual romanticism, one that is constructed from a mythic, utopian narrative. This myth is constructed from fragments of pre-existing myths which are no less nationalistic or patriarchal in origin: Alfred's very name recalls the medieval myth of King Alfred overthrowing the invading Danes, while Stonehenge is chosen as a location to (implicitly) construct a further myth in the *future history* of the novel (see Stock 2016, 430–32) as the locus of English resistance to foreign invasion through the positioning of the skeletons of English soldiers in a bunker below the Tor. Alfred and Hermann are linked into this mythic chain when they sacrifice themselves there to keep the forbidden book a secret.

*Swastika Night* has a "lucid awareness of the construction of genre, gender, and hegemonic discourse" (Baccolini 2000, 21) and it challenges the patriarchal and nationalist implications of this myth-making because Alfred sees through the Nazi myth and the narration encourages the reader to unpick the rather obvious mythical content of his opposition to Nazism. We are warned off Alfred's patriarchal path of English nationalism, and towards his path of radical criticism which permits the radical re-imagining of social relations, especially those of gender and sexuality. To underline this, Alfred dies not with his German lover Hermann at Stonehenge, but later in hospital after his son tells him that he has hidden the forbidden book with the Christian Joseph Black, whose allegiances are neither to the paganism of Stonehenge nor the myth of a once-powerful England. As illiterate holders of corrupted doctrinal knowledge, these future Christians lack the tools to beat Nazism by themselves. But as they move from their previous view of the written word as being heretical to being once more literal keepers of the book at the novel's close, they will provide the English resistance with spiritual guidance in their struggle.

Burdekin's novels help us to see the aesthetic implications of fascism as a politics constructed upon a spurious mythology that is at one and the same time romantically reactionary and thoroughly modern. She constructs this critique from the position of utopian romanticism. Utopia can become mythic when it is narrativised, when it points to there being in Ernst Bloch's (1988, 3) words, "something missing" which can only be fully understood in its radical alterity by being written as in an easily comprehensible and even *conservatively-written* form. But this should not distract us from the underlying radicalism of the utopian method,<sup>19</sup> which desires something beyond current epistemological understanding even as it sometimes posits ideas that appear immediately compatible with contemporary worldviews. It is this commitment to method that creates stories out of how the world could be re-made as a new world, and not

merely re-born as a more acceptable version of the present, which separates utopia from ideology and myth. In the next chapter, we will see how the catastrophic impact of World War II led dystopian fiction away from political allegory and utopian possibility. By focusing on the individual psychological impact of historical forces, dystopian fictions during and immediately following the War instead addressed issues of identity together with the values and practice of history.

## Notes

- 1 Patai insists that neglect of Burdekin is largely due to the ill-deserved dominance of Orwell's masculinist *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a dystopian ur-text. Notwithstanding the different publication contexts of the two texts, however, I would question whether this should be treated as a zero sum game.
- 2 "Nazism" was a broad-based political movement (including active supporters who were not official party members) whose ideology has been the guiding influence on fascism internationally to this day. I use the acronym of the official name of the Nazi Party (NSDAP) throughout this chapter where I wish to draw attention specifically to the historical German political party, rather than Nazis/Nazism more broadly.
- 3 Kevin Amidon and Dan Krier (2009, 493–95 *passim*) argue that Theweleit's work fails to adequately address the "facticity" of the use of rape as a weapon by men in the Freikorps. In *Swastika Night* rape is institutionalised as the exclusive means of reproduction. As such, Burdekin not only anticipates Theweleit as Shaw suggests, but even goes a step beyond his critique.
- 4 See also Stock (2016, 430).
- 5 The title pages of *Children of Jacob* and *No Compromise* give the author as Burdekin's pseudonym Murray Constantine.
- 6 Gentile points to the "extremist and exclusive nature of [political religion's] historical mission" (2005, 35) to distinguish it qualitatively from civic religion of the sort advanced by Rousseau in *The Social Contract* ([1762] 2003).
- 7 At a more granular level John O'Loughlin's (2002, 240) exploratory spatial analyses of voting patterns for the NSDAP in Weimar Germany shows methodological issues with available census and election data "continue to plague the quantitative historical studies of Weimar Germany... the country did not have a nationalized electorate and... a very complex cultural–historical mosaic underlies the electoral map". O'Loughlin finds that "regional variation in the advantages to the NSDAP from the Protestant proportion is large, from an advantage of only 0.2% in its core support region, Prussia, to 12.2% in Bavaria", with the strongest Protestant support occurring in Catholic areas (Bavaria and the Rhineland) during the 1930 election (2002, 224).
- 8 The historian perhaps most closely associated with "political religion theory" is Roger Griffin, who edited the very book in which Steigmann-Gall makes this claim. In his introductory chapter Griffin's only mention of Himmler is to quote him as declaring Nazism opposed to the "religion" of Bolshevism.
- 9 The fascists' claim belies the often-complementary relationship between fascist regimes and big business.
- 10 *The Observer* reported two weeks later on 28 May 1933 that a cotton manufacturer from Lodz had sent Captain J.E. Sears 40s reimbursing him for the fine, and thanking him "for having the courage to do it".
- 11 On the invention of pre-rolled cigarettes and the urban experience of modernism, see Judith Brown (2009), chapter 1.



- 12 Women were especially important as patrons to the cinema (which by the 1930s could be found in even the smallest British town): a 1990s memory survey suggested women were more likely than men to go twice or more per week to the cinema (Kuhn 1999, 535).
- 13 Daphne Patai (1993, 231) asserts that Burdekin's model for this narrative was Olaf Stapledon's *First and Last Men* ([1930] 1972). This may well be the immediate model, but Stapledon was in turn profoundly influenced by Wells, and the "estranged eye" technique of which this is ultimately an example was much used by Enlightenment figures such as Voltaire and Diderot.
- 14 The Person avoids using pronouns for self-description altogether. Here I opt for the gender-neutral singular "they".
- 15 This itself relies on somewhat superficial understandings of the state of evolutionary theory at the time.
- 16 As Raffaella Baccolini (2000, 20) notes, even Alfred "believes that trying to teach his daughter Edith to be different would make her consciously unhappy" by separating her from other women, and despite his "pride" in her on his deathbed, "the choice to exclude Edith from being the recipient of his new knowledge forecloses any possibility of agency for her".
- 17 According to Vincent Geoghegan (2004, 127) Ernst Bloch went further, accusing Mannheim in a letter to Siegfried Kracauer of plagiarism and calling him an "arselicker" ("Arschkriechen") for his dedication of the book to Alfred Weber.
- 18 For Tim Armstrong (1998, 5), modernism encompasses,

both a rejection of the past and a fetishization of certain earlier periods; both primitivism and a defence of civilization against the barbarians; both enthusiasm for the technological and fear of it; both a celebration of impersonal making and a stress on subjectivity. It is both politically and sexually radical, and drawn to Fascism as an expression of a stability of social relations; both lofty in its cultural aims, declaring the autonomy of the artists, and preoccupied with self-promotion and market relations.

- 19 Bottici (2007, 197) declares that she only wants to treat utopia "*strictu sensu*" as "the literary genre that was inaugurated by Thomas More's *Utopia*" (a work that self-referentially and metafictionally positions itself as going "far beyond Plato's *Republic*" (More 2016, 126)). She then treats utopias as "programs for the reform of the present", which like political myths are potential "sites for the work of the radical imagination" (Bottici 2007, 198). The helpful discussion Bottici has presented hitherto is threatened by a retreat to a Sorelian distinction between the description of political myth as an "invitation to act now" and utopias as "no-places" which serve to orient us in the present, more like ideology (2007, 199). The discussion of Burdekin's fiction here should serve to demonstrate that, to put it in Blochian terms, utopia can indeed demand that we do something for it.

## 6 Dystopia at its limits

### The Second World War and history

#### Introduction

War is a common theme of dystopian fiction. Even in texts such as *Brave New World* in which the population lives in subdued worldwide peace, there is often somewhere in the future-as-past a conflict of great magnitude that has enabled the dystopian story world to come into being. In the preceding chapters war has been dealt with in the main as a plot device; here the focus shifts to discuss how the dystopian genre was utilised by a selection of authors during and immediately following the Second World War, a conflict unprecedented in scale and destructiveness that had been long predicted in both cultural and political life. As with the works examined in previous chapters, historical conditions are closely bound to the conditions under which these texts were produced, and in responding to the 1940s and a type of “social experience which is still *in process*” (R. Williams 1977, 132 emphasis in original) these texts formed part of a common structure of feeling.

The instability of this social experience as process is reflected in formal developments within the dystopian genre. While the first novel examined here, Karin Boye’s *Kallocain* (1940), shares thematic and formal links with earlier dystopias such as Zamyatin’s *We* and E. M. Forster’s “The Machine Stops”, the subsequent texts I deal with have strongly dystopic atmospheres which are further from the centre point of the “fuzzy set” of dystopia outlined in the introduction. There are likewise changes in emphasis in how these books approach politics. Broadly, if the allegorical and mythological future-set dystopias of the mid to late 1930s were often politically committed to change in the direction of national politics and international relations, then dystopian fictions produced during the war were more concerned with how the contemporary world might appear through a historical lens. These are works of political fiction, but without quite the same didactic immediacy as dystopias of the mid-1930s. Instead, the novels examined in this chapter all reflect on the values and practice of history itself. Indeed, such fictions may perhaps be regarded as in some sense elegiac: some of them are concerned less with the future than with a sense of irreplaceable loss.<sup>1</sup> As such, these texts bring to the discussion of the practice of history a personal dimension. Focusing on

individual characters trying to maintain moral autonomy at times of revolutionary upheaval, these texts deal with the psychological impact of dealing with powerful and intrusive regimes.

The discussion here opens with a brief examination of Karin Boye's *Kallocain* (1940). This example serves to introduce how the dystopian form has been used to probe the relationship between the individual, history and the modern state in an age when personal autonomy is increasingly limited by concentrating on individual psychoanalytic concerns. I argue that for Boye this question is at base libidinal: by identifying with the intrusions of the state as an aggressor the individual is insulated from unpredictable currents of historical upheaval.

In Rex Warner's *The Aerodrome* (1940), this personalisation of historic forces is further reduced by allegory to the level of familial relationships. Here the haptic senses are used to emphasise the need to resist the forces of fascism as a type of patriarchal dominance through gained empirical experience of the sensory world. Warner's novel explores the quest for identity in the inter-war generation, in a world in which authoritarian forces seek to disconnect individuals from their pasts, cutting them adrift into an unending present of domination. Storm Jameson's *Then We Shall Hear Singing: A Fantasy in C Major* (1942) is similarly concerned with identity, but she explores childhood development as a process of connection between community, language, history and the individual in greater psychoanalytic depth. Jameson connects the development of language (and especially the mother tongue) with political development and the desire for self-determination as a left-liberal principle in a homogenous peasant community, (imprecisely) modelled on Czechoslovakia. The question of self-determination is pushed further in Aldous Huxley's *Ape and Essence* (1948), in which the nineteenth-century New Zealander trope of a visitor to a future ruined London is repurposed to satirically explore a small devil-worshipping theocratic community in a future post-nuclear war Los Angeles. Huxley makes a characteristically complex intervention in post-Darwinian debates about the point at which biological determinism gives way to ethical responsibility. Huxley effectively seeks a way for the individual to detach themselves from the cruelties and terrors of history through a concern with romantic love and spiritual fulfilment. Ultimately, and despite his arguments elsewhere in favour of establishing small co-operative communities built around the Emersonian doctrine of self-reliance, Huxley's "solution" to the international problems of the early Cold War retreats away from the social into a form of political quietism, and the relentless focus on the individual risks thereby becoming wholly anti-utopian.

### **Karin Boye's *Kallocain***

Karin Boye (1900–41) was a celebrated poet in 1920s Sweden long before she became a novelist. During this period she was active in the international worker movement Clarté, but following a 1928 trip to Russia she became disillusioned with socialism and according to Richard Vowles, "in the early

thirties she wrote extensively for the liberal journals and the little magazines, chiefly *Spektrum*, which did so much to acquaint Sweden with the surrealists and T. S. Eliot" (1966, ix). She also spent time undergoing psychoanalysis in Berlin. Her dystopian novel *Kallocain*, subtitled "*roman från 2000-talet*" in Swedish ("novel from the 2000s"), tells the story of Kall, a scientist captured by the "Universal State" in their war with the "Worldstate" some twenty years previously. The novel comprises Kall's recollections of the period leading up to the attack by the Universal State on "Chemical City No. 4", a city in which, echoing Forster's "The Machine Stops", citizens live and work underground, requiring a "surface permit" should they ever wish to take a breath of fresh air. As with Forster's story, the subterranean world is a suffocating burrow that isolates the individual within the domestic sphere. As a Bakhtinian chronotope it is closed to spatial change and temporal development; the only narrative events that occur here are expressly contrary to the social and legal rules which define it.

In the Worldstate Kall was the inventor of the truth serum "Kallocain", which he used in Manichean manoeuvrings to increase his power and prestige in the totalitarian government machinery of which he was then part. As Alison Winter (2003, 226) notes, the "very naming [of Kallocain] is a clue, perhaps, that it will not have the straightforward role of dissolving the individual mind into the collective as Kall initially proposes": the protagonist persistently presses for the drug to be named after him as discoverer. Much like D-503 in Zamyatin's *We*, who disavows his individualism even as he extends it through the very diary in which he writes, Leo Kall is both the model citizen and the self-contradictory consciousness that undermines the state's drive to total collectivisation.

As Vowles (1966, xix) observes, "the closest relative and very likely the progenitor" of *Kallocain* is Zamyatin's *We*. Both novels centre on a protagonist split between official duty and "some inner cancer to be exercised. In *We* it is fancy, or imagination; in *1984* [sic] it is memory; in *Kallocain* it is the *élan vital*, the hidden well-spring of love" (1966, xx). Where *Kallocain* differs from these two is that it relies on the psychological impossibility of a consciousness that is not motivated first and foremost by a set of impulses that go beyond mere self-preservation and point to the individual subject's relationship with the Other: personal autonomy – even a mystical desert city of individual autonomous agents of which rumours abound – is not enough for Leo Kall, unless "There could be a bridge between person and person – so long as it was voluntary, yes, so long as it was given as a gift and received as a gift" (Boye 1966, 175). Individual autonomy is only a means to an end, and that end is the "enviable illusion" (1966, 159) of mutual, interpersonal love both between couples and parent and child. If there is such thing as society for Boye then to parody Margaret Thatcher it is only *through* (the ethical relations of) individuals and their families.

As a tragic figure, Kall fails to see until it is too late the relationship between his need for the security of love and his personal ambition.

Although in common with Zamyatin's D-503 he worries that he has "secret individualistic currents below the surface" (Boye 1966, 122), Kall never plays the naïve victim of an opposition plot in the manner of D-503. More of an Iago than an Othello perhaps, Kall uses the romantic "love" he claims to feel for his wife Linda as an excuse to forcibly inject her with the truth serum in an act that Vowles (1966, xvii) rightly describes as "a kind of mental rape". What he hopes to find (but does not) is proof of her love for his boss Rissen, which would give Kall an excuse to denounce him to the police and have him killed. After he assaults his wife Kall realises, "It was not, and never had been, because he was my possible rival that I must get rid of him. My detestation was deeper than that" (Boye 1966, 156). By killing Rissen, Kall had hoped to remove "even the Rissen within myself... One killed Rissen and then one was a true fellow-soldier again, a happy, healthy cell in the State organism" (1966, 158–9). Using phrasing notably similar to that of Zamyatin and perhaps drawing on her experience of psychoanalysis, Boye treats the issue of the individual and the state as being at base libidinal.

When Kall is captured during the raid by the Universal State at the novel's climax, he fails to recognise that his attackers are enemy soldiers. Kall is himself dressed in military uniform for one of his weekly duties overseeing a social event, and at first assumes that his capture is simply a mistake on the part of the paratroopers in the course of conducting a "gigantic night-maneuver" (Boye 1966, 188). Only when he hears his captors speaking "in a completely foreign language, of which I did not understand one word" does Kall realise "we were not at all victims of a night maneuver. We were prisoners of the enemy" (1966, 189). The foreign soldiers and the state to which Kall is sworn become impossible to differentiate here because Kall both strongly identifies with the state and sees it as an aggressor. In other words, it performs a role not unlike the superego, which Sigmund Freud (2001, 21:124) once described as the mechanism by which civilisation "obtains mastery over the individual's dangerous desire for aggression by weakening and disarming it and setting up an agency within him to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city". The foreign soldiers, aggressors with whom Kall at first identifies, arrive at precisely the moment when Kall is feeling sick as a result of his aggressive actions against others (namely Rissen and Linda), and represent the turning inward of his desire for political power against himself. For Boye, the rise of totalitarian states says as much about the psychic conditions of individuals like those in her imagined Voluntary Sacrificial Service who volunteer to give up their autonomy and wellbeing to the regime to undergo medical experiments as it does about those Party apparatchiks who desire absolute power over others. History will record that individuals welcomed the dissolution of the autonomous self into a totalised state not in order to play a part in historic destiny, but rather that they may be insulated against the winds of historical change.

## Rex Warner's *The Aerodrome*

### *Mud*

Rex Warner's third novel *The Aerodrome* is similarly concerned with the relationship between the individual and history. For Reeve (1989, 78), "*The Aerodrome* examines the edges rather than the centre of the contemporary crisis – or rather it represents a move to the periphery in search of an alternative view of the centre." Indeed, the novel offers not one but several vantage points using a narrative that offers multiple readings through its engagement with different genres. At the level of formal politics, it tells the story of the Air Force as a symbol of modernity and fascist re-organisation of the state occupying and subsuming a quaint English country village, in which authority had previously rested in the traditional seats of Squire and Rector. This tale of competing political interests is played out through the narrative of a young man of great aesthetic sensibility who is temporarily estranged from the "natural world" by entry into the Air Force, before seeing the error of his ways. But the protagonist Roy's quest to discover his own identity can also be described as a *Bildungsroman* in which he achieves self-knowledge by discovering who his real parents are, or more accurately, who his parents (and by extension their entire generation) *really are*. Finally, like many dystopias *The Aerodrome* is also a love story, albeit that in this case the romance is somewhat unusual: the impediment that stands between its narrator Roy and his lover Bess for much of the text is a mistaken belief they are siblings.

*The Aerodrome* therefore functions as an inquest into the nature of identity and identification at multiple levels. The extraordinary opening sentence of the novel gives an indication as to the complex manner by which this process takes place:

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance to me of the events which had taken place previous to the hour (it was shortly after ten o'clock in the evening) when I was lying in the marsh near the small pond at the bottom of Gurney's meadow, my face in the mud and the black mud beginning to ooze through the spaces between the fingers of my outstretched hands, drunk, but not blindly so, for I seemed only to have lost the use of my limbs.

(Warner 2007, 13)

Warner begins the sentence by reaching back into the past, with an analeptic allusion to events immediately prior to the point at which he opens the text. The narrator gives no time frame for these previous events, which may have taken place during that very evening, or many years previously. The sentence holds in tension this reach into an only dimly specified past period with the present, literally grounding the narrative in the mud of Gurney's Meadow. The opening is then both tightly specific and highly ambiguous in terms of

sensory feelings and temporal location alike. Indeed, the ensuing story makes clear that as a young man Roy cannot escape the complicated history of his parents' lives any more than his entire generation, born at the end of the First World War, can escape the processes of history which led inexorably to them having to fight in the Second World War.

Echoing the experience of trench warfare which many men of Roy's parents' generation had to face, he has lost use of his limbs and is lying with his face pressed into the dirt. This muddy experience of the past can be properly described as haptic. As Abbie Garrington (2008, 78) explains, the haptic is not simply about the sensation of touch, but rather "the combination of an intentional reaching and touching with the human skin, in addition to the appreciation of movement by the body as a whole". Following Guilian Bruno, for Garrington (2008, 79) the haptic denotes a "reciprocal contact" between self and environment, and in addition the body's kinesthetic sense of movement in space. Thus Roy feels the contact of his "face in the mud", while in addition experiencing the kinesthetic sensation of "the black mud beginning to ooze through the spaces between the fingers of my outstretched hands". This is complicated by his state of drunkenness, confusing his proprioception, and as Garrington further notes, "the haptic sense is activated by travel and spatial experience, and that such experience may be emotional as well as physically sensory, an emotional journey" (2008, 78). What touches Roy's emotional sense here is not only the impact of what he has just been told (we will shortly learn) about his own parentage, but the experiences of his whole parents' generation.

The literal "grounding" in mud provides no relief to the sense of insecurity which Roy's loss of proprioception engenders, reflecting his loss of a sense of self both physically and psychically (due to the confusion over his parentage). What Roy terms the loss of "the security in which I had been bred" (Warner 2007, 108) is soon compounded by the deaths of the village's traditional symbols of authority: the Squire (as landowner) and the Rector (as representative of the Church, as well as having played the role of Roy's father throughout his life to date). The substitute Roy finds for his father is the Air Vice-Marshal, a man revealed at the climax of the novel to be his birth father. It is he who also bears ultimate responsibility for the Rector's death, as the head of the organisation whose display machine-gun is incorrectly loaded with live rounds instead of blanks at the annual agricultural show. The shooter is the Flight-Lieutenant, who is himself later fatally shot by the Air Vice-Marshal. (We later discover his killer was his father, and hence the Flight-Lieutenant is half-brother to Roy.)

For Reeve (1989, 15), *The Aerodrome* "erases the last traces of Marxist faith to which *The Professor* had clung with edgy confidence". Warner's commitment to Marxism had never been as wholehearted as that of his good friend Cecil Day-Lewis, but it is notable that the closest *The Aerodrome* gets to a moderately developed working-class character is Bess, brought up as the daughter of independent business-owning publicans. Roy himself is by

upbringing a member of the village elite, and he clearly approves of the traditional order of the shire village governed by convention and the patronage of Rector and Squire. While he freely associates with local labourers in the pub, Roy holds himself above them, often superciliously. At the Rector's funeral, for example, he states that, "There seemed to me something dumb and ox-like in their attentive frowning faces" (Warner 2007, 96).

The funeral represents an important turning point in the novel's narrative. The Air Vice-Marshal is granted permission to speak during the service, and uses the platform both to abuse the villagers' way of life and to announce the annexation of the village by the Aerodrome, a move with clear allegorical parallels in Nazi Germany's re-militarisation of the Rhineland and successive expansion into Austria and the Sudetenland. The move succeeds not in spite but because of the Air Force's brazenness, and here again there are clear historical parallels. As noted in chapter four (p. 96) in relation to Warner's *The Professor*, Hannah Arendt pointed to the "frank" and "mendacious" manner in which totalitarian movements proudly boasted of their past crimes and future intentions as a means of attracting supporters motivated by violent hatred and disaffection (1966, 307).

The mendaciousness of the Nazis is mirrored in the deeply personal nature of the attack that the Air Vice-Marshal and his followers undertake against the mores and morals of the villagers. Not "despite" but rather *because* he is appalled, Roy is compelled by the Air Force's "morbid force of attraction" to their cause. As with fascists in a variety of European settings, it is the seductive combination of an apparently well-organised and regulated system alongside the arrogant public swagger of their criminality in which lies the allure of the Air Force for Roy. Their political goals are not especially relevant to his desires. As Reeve (1989, 15) states, "Roy wanders into fascism and out again for purely personal reasons, never showing any real interest in the detail of its wider aims and policies". Just as the Air Force treats the village and its inhabitants as mere objects and obstacles to be negotiated in pursuit of its goals, so Roy also treats the Air Force instrumentally at first, although later for a time he does fall under its spell. When he decides to join up in order to be able to marry Bess (he has not yet been (mistakenly) told that she is his sister), he says of the Air Vice-Marshal that, although

Previously I had been repelled by almost everything which the man had done and said, now I felt myself attracted to what appeared to be his power and the small amount of cordiality in his voice. Or perhaps my feelings were the result of a sudden realization of how useful to me, in the plans I had just made, this offer of assistance might be.

(Warner 2007, 118)

The carefree cynicism with which Roy approaches everything in life betrays a peculiarly English sense of bourgeois security. Roy's unspoken expectation is that a *decent chap* like himself (with the right type of class background) ought



not to find it too difficult to get on in life by ingratiating himself with the right sort of people. His difficulties arise from the way in which he attempts to apply his privileged assumptions to the new hierarchy of the Air Force. As the son of the Rector, a traditional source of authority in the village, Roy expects a certain deference from the villagers by virtue of heredity, and the “naturalness” of their interactions demonstrates the lazy ease with which the Establishment reproduces itself. (It is notable in this context that Roy turns to the Air Force as a means both to marry Bess and to escape the path the Rector has carved out for him into the Civil Service.) At first, the Air Vice-Marshal seems to provide a meritocratic corrective to this by virtue of his critique of family structures and “the servility of historical tradition” (Warner 2007, 178). But when the Air Vice-Marshal and Roy establish a father-son relationship it is not difficult to draw analogies with the complacent response of the British Establishment to the rise of fascism. Throughout this change, Roy refuses to reflect on the consequences of his actions for the village as a whole.

### *History, memory, and forgetting*

Roy joins the Air Force without reflecting on the consequences of their plans for the village due to his youthful arrogance, which is in turn based upon the security of his upbringing. He severely underestimates the ideological drive of the Air Force. The Air Vice-Marshal, on the other hand, is essentially correct when he assesses the village as having possessed, “conditions approximating to those of the age of feudalism, a government that was ignorant in spite of its complacency, inefficient, though well-meaning, based on a faith that nobody perfectly understood, and that most people, in all practical affairs, disregarded entirely” (Warner 2007, 179).

The Air Vice-Marshal wants to transform the village for the benefit of the Air Force as military and political elite. He promises to free the air men from “the bondage of the past”, represented by their parents, and “the bondage of the future”, represented by the nuclear family and the ownership of property. The “air men” are to bear no children and own no property in order that they may see themselves as “conscious and deliberate shapers of [their] own destinies and those of others” (Warner 2007, 180). The crux of the Air Force’s ideology is here revealed to be a rejection of any force, be it emotional or economic, that binds the individual or exerts a pull of loyalty upon them to anyone or anything beyond the institution of the Air Force itself. The Air Force, in other words, intends to become a totalising regime, and thereby to control past and future alike. The Air Vice-Marshal’s impossible dream is to achieve a perfect political form that resists the “shapelessness” (2007, 221) of time.

Here the limitations of Warner’s Air Force as an allegory for fascism are brought into focus. Nazism in particular had an obsession with historical record that can be witnessed in everything from the archives created during the prosecution of the crimes of the Shoah to Albert Speer’s designs for monumental buildings that would eventually crumble into picturesque ruins

to rival those of Rome. As outlined in previous chapters, historical myth was central to Nazi ideology, whereas the Air Vice-Marshal aims at nothing less than a society of total forgetfulness. Such a community, living in a state Nietzsche (1997, 64) once described as an “unhistorical condition”, would be able to act freely without being tethered by the “conscience” of the past. But Nietzsche also warns that man “cannot learn to forget but clings relentlessly to the past: however far and fast he may run, this chain runs with him” (1997, 61). Roy tethers the Air Vice-Marshal to his past, and he treats Roy with favouritism. The opening of the novel, in which past events and a sense of belonging to the land are tied to the cyclical seasons of the natural world, thereby points to memory as the site of resistance which the Air Force and its leader cannot overcome.

### *Values of nature*

Like Katharine Burdekin, Rex Warner is interested in myth and the exploration of multiple temporalities. But here Warner goes even beyond Burdekin’s mythopoeic valorisation of the English countryside in order to point to the values which the fight against fascism must defend. There are values and interests bound up in our perception of the beauty of this English landscape, which has been moulded and contoured by human activity.

Around the time of the publication of *The Aerodrome*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno began preparation of their work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which they traced the history of the idea of “nature” as “something neither human nor a product of human labour; nature as a force which stands outside and over humankind. This use connotes the related ideas of ‘the natural world’, ecology and the environment” (Stock 2012, 38). As I have discussed elsewhere, Horkheimer and Adorno claimed that, in Homer’s *Odyssey*,

The gods and mythic monsters control non-human forces which stand against Odysseus and his companions. The hero must appease, trick or coerce them into doing his bidding. For the Frankfurt School theorists, Odysseus is a harbinger of the modern bourgeoisie (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997, 47). He displays cunning, ruthlessness and a hunger to be master of both men and gods.

(Stock 2012, 39)

Monotheism made such a narrative impossible to maintain: in a universe created by an all-powerful God there are strict hierarchies of good and evil alike, and while God makes covenants and strikes deals (for example the agreement Abraham makes with God over Sodom (Genesis 18: 16–33)), and the Devil makes Faustian pacts for his own benefit, neither are ever truly tricked – much less coerced – by mortal humans. Power over natural disasters and seasonal cycles alike ultimately resides with God.

For Horkheimer and Adorno, Francis Bacon's *The New Organon* (1620) begins the process of upending this order, as the ultimate aim of his new "experimental philosophy" is to systematically master nature's forces and turn them to man's own ends. While Bacon (2000, 33) acknowledged that "Nature is conquered only by obedience", he would later begin his (unfinished) utopia *The New Atlantis* (1626), in which he outlined a vision of a future in which humankind would be master of their own destiny by the willed manipulation of nature's forces (Stock 2012, 40). Mastery of (non-human) nature therefore has expressly political consequences as it implies a certain ordering of the world in which humans are bound up. If, as Marx (1975, 425) states, "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness" then the interrelation of humans and the landscape in which they reside has profound and far-reaching political and ideological implications.

In *The Aerodrome*, the treatment of nature is highly ideological. Warner valorises the English countryside as the home of innumerable species of birds, flora and fauna. But this is a rural landscape that is maintained and farmed, not a wilderness. In the opening scene Roy as narrator describes, "fine meadows gently swept downwards to the river. They were intersected by narrow ditches where water-rails are often to be seen, stepping more delicately than racehorses" (Warner 2007, 13). The birds make their homes in irrigation ditches, adapting to the human environment. In turn, tenant farmers and labourers work the land for the Squire as village landowner. Economic and social forces physically shape the landscape just as much as the winding river.

The mud in the novel's opening sentence grounds the narrator in the economic and social order of a specific moment in history. Roy's parents' generation fought for the benefit of this very order on the battle plains of the First World War which the muddy scene recalls. Roy is detached from both the landscape and the socio-economic order through his entry into the Air Force, and a turning point for him comes when he thinks "with longing, and with shame for my neglect of them, of the meadows whose soil I had not touched for so long" (Warner 2007, 260). The novel's final sentences mirror the opening:

I remember the valley itself and how I saw it again as I had seen it in my childhood, heard a late-sleeping redshank whistle from the river, and thought of the life continuing beneath the roofs behind me.

'That the world may be clean': I remember my father's words. Clean indeed it was and most intricate, fiercer than tigers, wonderful and infinitely forgiving.

(Warner 2007, 302)

The world is "clean" and well ordered; nature has re-assumed its regularity, the birds are subservient to human activity, and the villagers are returning to old patterns of life. These are *social facts* in the sociological sense, and they are intimately connected.

### Then We Shall Hear Singing

Storm Jameson's 1942 novel *Then We Shall Hear Singing* is not set in England, but it opens with a similarly nostalgic feel for the pastoral to Warner's text, with a description of the dream of the retired General Helmuth von Lesenow for his parents' house in North Germany. The house is described as sitting beside a "lake with the centuries-old birches, and the water-fowl nesting close together in the reeds" (1942, 6). The novel tells the story of the attempt by this occupying power to achieve total control over the population of the neighbouring country they occupy as a "Protectorate" through a new and invasive medical procedure developed by the sadistic Doctor Hesse, which erases memories and turns its victims into obedient servants of the regime. Baron von Rennensee, who administers the occupation of this "Protectorate", together with his friend General Lesenow turns against Doctor Hesse and the regime they have hitherto accommodated and worked for, while country peasants tenaciously begin their own rebellion.

The operation developed by Hesse closely resembles that developed by the One State in Zamyatin's *We*. Yet rather than excising the imagination alone, as in Zamyatin's text, Doctor Hesse proposes that he is "going to take away their minds. The memories of a nation of perpetual servants will be buried with its old women and their gossiping tongues" (S. Jameson 1942, 20–21). Hesse's misogynistic disgust with a populace he sees as bitter but weak blinds him to the strength that the old women possess precisely by virtue of their capacity to remember and re-tell what others more easily forget. The power of memory proves too powerful and the minds of those attacked by the doctor heal themselves, enabling a full rebellion to get underway at the novel's close.

Much like the traditional patterns of life in Warner's *The Aerodrome*, folk memory of the time before the country was conquered is pressed into service as the glue that binds the population together and will form the basis of a popular rebellion, do what the invaders may. Everyday objects are invested with political significance as reminders of freedom, alongside the stories, songs and language native to the country. Indeed, there is some debate among the peasants about what is of greatest importance for maintaining a sense of national folk identity: Anna, one of the strongest female characters, suggests, "Your child doesn't need books... Every time you put a cup into his hand that was made by one of our people, and used by them, he can learn enough from it. Everything our dead have used will teach him enough. If you've first taught him to listen" (S. Jameson 1942, 35). This enjoinder to learn how to listen to an oral tradition of folk-memory connects the concerns of child rearing in the domestic sphere to a wider political project with geo-political implications.

Likewise, when the peasant Stepanka accidentally smashes a cup she keeps the fragments because, "it belonged to my great-grandmother. I always thought of her when I was using it. She didn't know that someone in her family would still be using it when the country was free". Her husband asks

what “has she had to smile at since we ceased to be free?” Stepanka replies, “at her great-granddaughter touching her very cup and thinking about freedom” (S. Jameson 1942, 51). Storm Jameson mobilises folk tradition at every opportunity in the novel to show how the simplest of domestic objects may carry with it great value as a political symbol capable of motivating a whole nation to political action. Notably, as with the mud in Warner’s *The Aerodrome*, it is the haptic experience of touch which imbues the cup with value. Against the monumental, elitist, androcentric “Great Man” view of history which Warner’s Air Vice-Marshal and Jameson’s own Doctor Hesse adhere to, Jameson here suggests that it is the force of a unified people and not charismatic political leaders who perform truly historical acts.

The dream of freedom reaches into every object the peasants keep from the days before the invasion. For example, six bottles of hidden wine made from vines that the invaders tore up in order to plant their hops play a key ceremonial role when they are used to toast the start of the rebellion (S. Jameson 1942, 224–5). The sanctifying potential of the wine to invest the action with religious significance is underlined by the fact that for most of the text the wine is stored in a casket along with a crucifix. The freedom to continue to engage in traditional patterns of picturesque country life including religious practices hereby form an important corollary to the freedom to organise politically, and freedom from the intrusive surveillance of the district Overseer.

If everyday objects are anchors to folk memory, then the signifiers to which they are attached also play a key role in the peasants’ linguistic heritage. Wise to this, the invaders forbid public use of the native language. At school, children get their first taste of the invaders’ violence when they are “not allowed to use [their mother tongue]... not even at first when they understood none of the orders” (S. Jameson 1942, 53). Children are punished for singing in their first language, and the invaders have naturally “burned every book” (1942, 34). Education is itself restricted to that which is politically useful in cementing the invaders’ rule; children learn only “a little of that other language, enough to understand orders – enough to be servants” (1942, 34). The invaders see language as a route toward total domination. The operation performed upon nearly every member of the village at the heart of the story by Doctor Hesse is underpinned by a concerted attack on the native language of the invaded country, which the invaders perceive to be a well of resistance, because

A man’s own tongue is his only way back to his ancestors, to all that store of memories, commands, certainties, they left for him in the caves under his own few memories... his own language is the nerve joining him to the forms, sounds, and colours of natural life. It is what scent is to an animal... A man’s own language is grown in his soil and reaches him smelling of it and not of any other richer or dryer. He saturates it with his own blood. He nourishes it with his own life, in every moment, with every breath his mind takes.

(S. Jameson 1942, 53)

This passage is not focalised through either the invader or the occupied. It is the third person narrative voice that presents the struggle of the occupied country in terms of a battle of identity begun when the child hears its mother speak from inside the womb. This is important because while at the heart of the quest for freedom in the novel is a desire to live according to one's own national and religious identity, the tendency of the invaders to reminisce about their childhoods suggest that they are projecting on to the romantic peasantry of the country which they occupy their own connections to a native land, language and community as the basis of a positive and "natural" patriotic identity. In other words, it is because they can so closely identify with the patterns of life of those they dominate that the invaders must annihilate the cultural memories of the community they occupy. Nowhere is this clearer than with the narcissistic Dr Hesse. In a fit of self-pity Hesse comes to Anna, one of the old women he outwardly holds in such contempt, to kneel with his head in her skirts and unburden himself of his sins, as if saying his childhood prayers to his mother (S. Jameson 1942, 195). For her own part Anna does not hesitate to let him know just how disgusting and pathetic he is.

Giving voice to the old women of the countryside, Jameson shows a different side to the existential conflict which was then engulfing Europe by setting out how they are the true keepers of culture and community identity. To do so, however, she has to perform a high wire act as this necessarily involves drawing out the similarities between Germans and Czechoslovakians (and by extension any other national/pan-national grouping). The invaders who develop a conscience, such as Rennensee, desire a return to older and simpler times; they are from old aristocratic families and fondly remember peaceful patterns of life in pre-Great War childhoods. Germans like Hesse struggle with their memories of this time as being poor and humiliating. They are condemned for acts of moral cowardice, masculine vanity, and instrumental ingenuity. But they have to be treated as though they have lost their way from their true identity; the monster of Dr Hesse is humanised as pathetically childlike and lonely.

For Rennensee and Lesenow to turn against the regime requires them to empathise with the romantic and traditional patterns of life they see in the communities they govern. The peasants' relationship to their home reminds them of a "truer" and older form of patriotism grounded in the value of tradition, or what in 1790 conservative philosopher Edmund Burke termed "untaught feelings", or natural "prejudice".<sup>2</sup> Their defence of these "untaught feelings" ignores the different uses to which a traditional practice may be put, or the contextual meanings that may be loaded on to it. It can in any case be difficult to distinguish what is truly "traditional" from what is only presented as such. For example, the Nazis' invented mythic narrative of "blood and soil" is comparable to Jameson's descriptions of the identity of the occupied villagers which is grounded in language, folklore, and a "feel" for native soil nourished by the bones of ancestors. As Antliff notes, "fascist politics were premised on mythmaking" (2002, 152) and "fascists selectively plundered

their historical past for moments reflective of the values they wished to inculcate for their radical transformations of national consciousness and public institutions” (2002, 150). While Jameson seeks to distinguish between conservatives who accommodated the new regime as a counter-Bolshevik measure and genuine Nazi ideologues, fascists were happy to borrow from conservatism the rhetoric of tradition. Jameson’s use of tradition in a fictionalised near-future context exposes a major problem with the usage of tradition as a marker of cultural value throughout the history of conservative politics from Burke onward: traditions are easy to selectively adapt, mould, or simply invent afresh as political circumstances dictate.

This problem with the value of tradition is exemplified by Jameson’s oversimplified presentation of the occupied country’s population as a wholly homogenous national community. In the case of Warner’s *The Aerodrome* the homogeneity of the population of the village, whose location is never mentioned, may cause the reader to pause before insisting on allegoric readings. But Jameson’s novel is more clearly set in the specific location of multilingual and multicultural Czechoslovakia, where the rich variety of cultural and ethnic communities included sizable populations of Roma and Jews. These groups, whom the novel wholly excludes, suffered the most at the hands of the German invaders from the first moment of occupation.

Such criticism is not intended to place in doubt Jameson’s commitment as a socialist and British president of international writers’ advocacy group PEN to the defeat of fascism and the protection of minorities, but merely to point to a shortcoming in the way that the narrative is so tightly shaped. Although the subtitle of the novel is “*A Fantasy in C Major*”, the urge to read the novel as pure allegory is hardly surprising given that the general outline of the story world is a near-future central Europe clearly connected to present events. But to reach beyond this issue requires us to be aware of other reading strategies too. Perhaps the most sympathetic treatment of Storm Jameson’s position would be to acknowledge the issue of exclusion as problematic, but to view this as ancillary to her main aims of exploring childhood development and the formation of political identity in relation to language through an estranging narrative. Such a reading involves refraining from interpreting the novel in the light of its allegorical content in the first instance in order to prioritise the novel’s more universal theme.

Jameson’s narrator states that the child first hears the maternal voice in the womb, and that the mother’s injunction to the midwife “give him to me” is a continuation of this “same voice, using the same language” (1942, 53). Thus while the infant identifies itself as undifferentiated from both the body and the voice of the mother, the family and wider community lay claim to the child as *belonging* through the performative speech acts of the mother. From one end of the spy-glass, as it were, we see here from the infant’s point of view what Julia Kristeva (1986, 95) terms the “semiotic *chora*... the place where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his unity succumbs before the process of charges and stases that produce him”. Through the charged energy

of oppositional drives [*pulsions*] the infant experiences the chora through the flow of “vocal and kinetic rhythm” (1986, 94 and see 12–13); the movements and sounds of its own body and that of the mother with which it identifies.

From the other end of the spy-glass (the position of the welcoming community) we see the child immediately invested with both gender identity and national identity through the injunction “give him to me”, spoken in (and by) the mother tongue. For Judith Butler (2011, 176), the “initiator performative ‘it’s a girl!’” requires and re-inscribes “the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity, ones that are almost always related to the idealization of the heterosexual bond”. In Jameson’s novel, the slightly altered initiator performative “give him to me” not only interpellates the subject as gendered, but also as belonging to a social, economic and national group. It is relevant here that Butler borrows Marxist structuralist Louis Althusser’s term “interpellation” to describe how “the ‘I’ only comes into being through being called, named... and this discursive constitution takes place prior to the ‘I’... paradoxically, the discursive condition of social recognition precedes and conditions the formation of the subject: recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms that subject” (Butler 2011, 171). In Jameson’s narrator’s phrase, the “he” (child) is the object, the “me” (mother) is the subject. For the child-as-object to become itself a subject requires a dual (and doubly paradoxical) process. On the one hand there is a social process of recognition that paradoxically both “precedes and conditions” the subject in its formation; on the other hand there is the overwhelming experience of competing drives, and the paradoxical process of separation (from the mother) and identification (of signs) by which the child enters the symbolic order. Jameson seems to identify this process of separation with the development of language as the narrator says of the mother tongue that, “When [the infant] uses it for the first time it separates him from things as familiar to him as the parts of his body” (S. Jameson 1942, 53). Thereafter, and within the symbolic order, it is language that connects the peasant to his native land through the relationship of signifier to signified:

He gives himself back again to things, when he describes them, when he takes them in his hand, when he thinks, This [sic] is my cup... When he dies and goes to his long home, in the last minute he dies from his own speech, and his words, his dear words, go to nourish the life past and future, the perpetual present.

(S. Jameson 1942, 53–54)

As with Warner’s *The Aerodrome*, language, the senses, and temporal experience are intimately connected here. In Warner’s novel, the Air Vice-Marshal’s aims to cut off all of his subordinates from any and all legal, emotional or social connection to past or future. His dream is that they should experience life as an unending present, closed to any possibility of the play of alterity by virtue of achieving a perfect social form. Language in the novel’s Air Force is a means of regimentation and indoctrination, of violence and subjugation.



Jameson here turns this on its head to see language more democratically in relation to “the perpetual present”: the “nourishing” of “life past and future” through the individual’s unique contribution to their community creates a sense of continuity across time. Doctor Hesse, meanwhile, has a similar conception of history to Warner’s Air Vice-Marshall. For both characters social groups and the agency of individuals within them do not create history, this is achieved by the “Historic” actions of a handful of powerful (male) actors and those they command, in obedience to a pre-existing “Law” (identical to the Nazi’s “Law of Nature”) that validates these actions. Hence, to Hesse,

History is the recognition in Time of Necessity... History is destiny. We were destined to make history by moving forward into the future. You can be sure that history will justify us. And why? For the sufficient reason that history has had the privilege of being made by us. History is what we are.  
(S. Jameson 1942, 72–73)

### **Aldous Huxley, *Ape and Essence***

Writing in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, Aldous Huxley looked askance at the invocation of an imagined future historical record as justification for political action in the present. In *Ape and Essence* (1948), Huxley begins to move away from political and public solutions to the problems of the twentieth century, turning social and political questions into private issues of spiritual renewal and personal relationships. The opening of the novel therefore eschews the typical dystopian strategy of beginning *in medias res*. Instead, Huxley grounds the novel’s action at a moment of historical importance in the immediate past, on 30 January 1948.

It was the day of Ghandi’s assassination; but on Calvary the sightseers were more interested in the contents of their picnic baskets than in the possible significance of the, after all, rather commonplace event they turned out to witness. In spite of all the astronomers can say, Ptolemy was right: the centre of the universe is here, not there.

(A. Huxley 1985, 7)

As a statement of political intent this opening may be regarded likewise as quite different to previous dystopian fictions, including that of Huxley’s own *Brave New World*. Refusing to allow the first clause to stand alone as a complete sentence, Huxley tethers the historical murder to a mundane leisure activity. “Calvary” most likely refers here to a picturesque LA cemetery in the first instance, although the name also recalls Golgotha.<sup>3</sup> The jarring and somewhat inelegant conversational phrasing serves to highlight that individuals are generally more concerned with their own basic and immediate needs than world historical events.

This opening is in fact a frame narrative, within which the dystopia is presented as the text of a script for an unrealised film set in a far-future

post-apocalyptic Los Angeles, which two second-rate movie executives find when it falls off the back of a dumpster truck. The rest of the frame narrative follows their attempt to track down the script's mysterious author William Tallis, only to discover that he died alone in a desert ranch house a few months previously. Hence while the dystopian imaginary is presented as a post-bomb future, it is expressly foregrounded as a fiction. Indeed, the artifice is continually foregrounded throughout the presentation of the future-set film script and the reader is constantly reminded that they belong to the historical era in which Ghandi's assassination took place.<sup>4</sup>

*Ape and Essence* clearly is not focused on mimetic accuracy, and the narrative structure is in some ways closer to a traditional western literary utopia than a typical modern dystopian novel. For example, the text begins with a journey from the existing present reality to the dystopian space of alterity, mirroring the traditional voyage of utopian discovery. In this story, botanist Dr Alfred Poole arrives in LA on an expedition from New Zealand and is taken captive by a team of grave robbers. Saved from death because of his apparent social use in increasing crop yields, the utopian device of a series of interviews with one or more prominent members of the utopian society is paralleled when Poole is given extensive information about the society during meetings with the Arch Vicar of Belial.<sup>5</sup> He also watches and takes part in the festivities of Belial Day, which include orgies and the sacrifice of children with mutations and deformations. The mirroring of utopian narratives concludes with Poole's escape from the community in the company of a young lover in search of another desert community where monogamy is still practiced. The possibility of return to the reader's present with which many utopias end is here preserved by virtue of the established fact that, after all, this dystopian story is only a movie treatment. The book ends with the movie treatment's closing words, but the reader is conditioned through the frame narrative to imagine shutting the book not in far-future Los Angeles, but rather in the (fictional) Los Angeles of the present, in which the script as document exists.

This is an important point, because *Ape and Essence* responds to Huxley's immediate experiences in 1947–48 just as surely as *Brave New World* responded to the early 1930s. Since the early 1940s, Huxley had been living seventy miles from Los Angeles in the Mojave Desert, in a property which Kerwin Klein (2001, 472) establishes as being a stone's throw from the ruins of the failed utopian socialist commune of Llano Del Rio. Huxley's attitude to the commune and its aims was characteristically ambivalent. On the one hand, in his essay "Science, Liberty and Peace" first published around the time he began writing *Ape and Essence* in 1947, Huxley argued for the decentralisation of power into small, quasi-autonomous communities based upon "a restatement of the Emersonian doctrine of self-reliance – a restatement, not abstract and general, but fully documented with an account of all the presently available techniques for achieving independence within a localized, co-operative community" (A. Huxley 1970, 142–43). In this context, self-governing communes like Llano Del Rio represented a sustainable future in spite of their apparent

fragility. On the other hand, Klein argues that the attraction of such communities for Huxley was their ability to sidestep history and not, we may add, to transcend it in the Emersonian vein. "History" is imagined here as "the 'public' sphere of work, politics, progress, and institutions like church and state that never rested from their instrumentalist labors". From this perspective, the projected far future in the discarded film treatment the executives find can be best understood as post-historic, in the sense that it is based at a time well after a nuclear holocaust has destroyed most of the world's population. The voyage into the wilderness at the end of *Ape and Essence* represents a retreat from these processes of history into the "private sphere of home and hearth" (Klein 2001, 474), and Klein goes so far as to call *Ape and Essence* a "polemic against history" (473).

Klein's insight points to a persistent issue in Huxley's scattergun approach to satire and criticism. Some of the novel's most important shortfalls arise from the attempt to synthesise a number of didactic impulses, which if not directly contradictory are at least in tension with each other. For example, Keith Leslie Johnson (2009, 574) has shown that Huxley uses the novel as an opportunity to engage with Darwinism, and specifically to "mount an ethical critique" of the views of his late grandfather T. H. Huxley, notwithstanding any of the man's "personal and intellectual merits". I argue that in so doing Aldous Huxley engages with Darwinism as a topic of intellectual history even as he disavows the processes of history as the discourse of the public sphere.

Johnson's contention is that *Ape and Essence* deals with whether liberal humanism can be justified in a post-Darwinian world. For Johnson (2009, 574) the novel poses the question, "if humans exist on a biological continuum with animals, what is the magical quantum of sympathy that transforms cooperative behavior into ethical behavior?" Darwin and T. H. Huxley's inability to answer the question leads Johnson to convincingly conclude that Darwinism "lacks a strong ethical narrative". In *Ape and Essence* Huxley therefore deals with the fallout of the poverty of ethics in his grandfather's defence of Darwinism. The task Aldous Huxley sets himself is to comprehend how a system which views the descent of man as biologically determined can provide a foundational basis for human ethics. Put another way, at what point do biologically determined impulses give way to self-consciously ethical debate?

T. H. Huxley viewed ethical behaviour through a humanist lens that sets apart the alienated and self-regarding ethics of humankind from co-operative animal behaviour. He married this to a worldview that utilises a strictly biological definition of *Homo Sapiens* (literally "wise man"), i.e. a definition that is wholly physiological in scope. The model of ethics that T. H. Huxley (insufficiently) develops, meanwhile, is part of a Gladstonian liberal worldview. As I have stated elsewhere,

The theories of Huxley and Darwin both "incorporated elements of liberal ideology" (Bowler 2003, 184), and the political commitment of both men to Gladstonian liberalism is unquestionable. Indeed, in March 1877,

Huxley visited Darwin at his home in the company of a group led by Liberal Party grandee John Lubbock that included William Gladstone himself.

(Stock 2015b, 439)

Lubbock was an early promoter of evolutionary ideas who tried to apply these to human history by looking at aboriginal Australians and other supposedly “primitive” cultures as “living fossils” (Bowler 2003, 211). This self-congratulatory racist thinking plotted a direct teleological line from the Stone Age to modern industrial capitalism. Although T. H. Huxley himself was careful to distinguish between evolution in natural history and (human) historical change, he did adhere to historical progressionism in other areas of his thinking. Hence, while it would be wrong to hold Huxley himself responsible for the development of the popular view that history and evolution are parallel systems of development, it would be fair to state that others who shared his ideological disposition were happy to promote such a view.

In *Ape and Essence* Aldous Huxley rhetorically follows the logic of an evolutionary view of history, effectively arguing that just as species evolve so that those best adapted to their environment survive and flourish, so too the path of scientific and technological advance in the post-Darwinian world has increasingly rewarded specialisation into a series of narrow fields. The seemingly inevitable end of this instrumentalised view of evolutionary theory can be seen near the start of Tallis’s film treatment, when “a choking scream announces the death, by suicide, of twentieth-century science” (A. Huxley 1985, 41). The suggestion here is that when many thousands of scientists work instrumentally toward purely technical outputs with little regard for the destructive end result of their collective work being, science becomes so specialised as to lead into an evolutionary (and *literal*) dead-end, such as with nuclear weapons.

Aldous Huxley’s ire is directed toward the value of “Progress”, which he deems to be essential to the historical metanarratives of liberalism, fascism and Communism alike. For example, the Gladstonian liberalism of free trade and low regulatory burdens that T. H. Huxley promoted was a worldview under which, as the Arch-Vicar puts it, “these wretched slaves of wheels and ledgers began to congratulate themselves on being the Conquerors of Nature... In actual fact, of course, they had merely upset the equilibrium of Nature and were about to suffer the consequences” (1985, 90). Liberalism, Huxley argues, shares with fascism and Communism a faith in the power of science to re-shape the world. As he put it elsewhere, “as theory, pure science is concerned with the reduction of diversity to identity. As a praxis, scientific research proceeds by simplification. These habits of scientific thought and action have, to a certain extent, been carried over into the theory and practice of contemporary politics” (A. Huxley 1970, 127).

From this perspective contemporary politics treats individuals as “nothing but bodies, animals, even machines” (A. Huxley 1970, 129) to be aggregated

and managed as populations. But unlike Communism and fascism, liberalism is salvageable through the esoteric invocation of small communities founded on an Emersonian doctrine of self-reliance in which individuals can enjoy a peaceful and fulfilling existence. Huxley's utopian suggestion is to return to political communities on a scale comparable to the ancient Greek polis. Through this suggestion he hopes to solve the world's global problems simply by excluding them as incompatible with such small-scale communities. This "solution" is played out in the novel's ending when Loola and Alfred escape the Belial worshippers to find a community to the north in Bakersfield. Importantly, the poetry to which Alfred Poole continually refers as the couple make their escape is Shelley's *Epipsychidion* and *Adonais*. The lines he quotes "furnish an inspired argument for the existence of a soul and a transcendent spiritual reality" (Baker 2000, 324), and they also point to salvation *only* being possible at a personal level through spiritual confrontation with the sublime. Notwithstanding this focus on the personal being precisely *non*-political, in "Science, Liberty and Peace" Huxley hedges his bets. Having argued for self-government by small communities, Huxley then demands oversight of scientific laboratories around the world by some kind of world power to prevent the misuse of science for the creation of ever more deadly weapons, declaring sardonically that "enlightened self-interest will unquestioningly vote for world government, international inspection and the pooling of information. But unfortunately, in some of the most important issues of life, human beings do not act from considerations of enlightened self-interest" (A. Huxley 1970, 148). History, it seems, has a nasty way of intruding where it is not wanted, and global concerns require some kind of global governance after all.

Throughout the novel, Huxley criticises those political worldviews which concern themselves with "Progress". As the novel proceeds, what begins with a critique of Victorian scientism becomes an ever more stridently anti-utopian polemic against the forces of "Progress and Nationalism". Huxley describes the former as "the theory that Utopia lies just ahead and that, since ideal ends justify the most abominable means, it is your privilege and duty to rob, swindle, torture, enslave and murder all those who, in your opinion (which is, by definition, infallible), obstruct the onward march to earthly paradise" (1985, 91). This closely parallels Karl Popper's (1966, 1:157) argument that Communism and fascism inherently tend toward violence because of their commitment to "Utopian engineering". On the other hand, despite its obvious teleology and frequent use of evolutionary metaphor, Huxley and Popper share a common belief that liberalism can be salvaged because it adopts what Popper terms a "piecemeal" approach to reform.<sup>6</sup> Huxley's desired exit from history is therefore rendered "safe" precisely because it is no more than Romantic wish-fulfilment. For Huxley (1985, 10–11), fascists are "the scientific poet[s] – of a new mythology" and to these merciless "good artists, sound thinkers and tried experimenters" he opposes "*Passion's golden purity*", as Shelley describes romantic love in *Epipsychidion*, a poem that calls into question the viability of utopian liberal gradualism.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

Before the Second World War, dystopian fictions tended to project forward into an imagined future in order to look back toward the present. In so doing, they were concerned with the direction upon which their authors perceived history to be travelling. Increasingly during the 1930s dystopias became politically committed allegories, which sought to make the case for political change as well as reflecting on specific events in the immediate past such as the Nazis' rise to power. During the Second World War the focus shifted slightly. The reflexive question "how did we get here?" (a revaluation of the immediate past) was less urgent in the face of the unfolding disaster of the war, and could be replaced with the question "what does all this *mean* in historical terms?" (In other words, how will history perceive the present?) To answer the question involved a re-consideration of the values and assumptions upon which history is based. This chapter has sought to historically situate these narratives as reflecting upon social processes in formation. Boye's *Kallocain* castigates individuals for welcoming totalitarianism in a misguided attempt to avoid the implications of historical change. Warner's *The Aerodrome* pits the Air Vice-Marshall's will to overcome the "shapelessness" of history against the bare sensation of feeling the earth beneath one's feet. Storm Jameson takes a similar approach to exploring what Nietzsche (1997, 62) termed the "plastic power" of a people "to transform and incorporate... what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds". Unlike Warner, Jameson does so with sensitivity to the ability of popular movements to create genuine historical change, rather than the diktats of an elite or "great man". Huxley, finally, turns away from history (conceived as action in the public sphere) altogether. As the next chapter will show, such quietism did not last long. Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* would quickly become an ur-text for the dystopian literature, returning to and reinvigorating some of the narrative conventions of interwar dystopian fiction in the process.

## Notes

- 1 I draw this idea from writer Abi Curtis (2017), who, in discussing her post-apocalyptic dystopian novel *Water and Glass* (2017) on a recent blogpost, states that environmental dystopias often "offer a sense of the elegiac".
- 2 "Instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a very considerable degree, and... we cherish them because they are prejudices; and the longer they have lasted, and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them" (Burke 1986, 183).
- 3 The reference is puzzling in its context: both the winter weather in mountainous Jerusalem and the military blockade which many parts of the city were under in January 1948 when *Ape and Essence* was published suggest that any reference to picnicking at Golgotha could only be ironic.
- 4 Notwithstanding the important ways in which the frame narrative adds to our interpretation of the novel as a whole it is worth noting that Huxley wrote two play

scripts of *Ape and Essence* (neither of which were ever produced) in which the frame narrative was dropped (see Klein 2001, 472 n. 11).

- 5 For example, the Governor of the Strangers' House and the Father of Salomon's House in Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* (1627), or Dick and old Hammond in William Morris's *News From Nowhere* (1890).
- 6 Unlike Huxley, however, Popper regards violence perpetrated by the liberal state as extrinsic to its ends.
- 7 Mandy Swann (2013, 405) argues that, "in Shelley's representation of universal utopia, he implies the inextricability of violence from gradualism, yet what he celebrates as utopia is the unrealizable eternity of gradualist progress. In the utopian ruin of *Epipsychidion*, he celebrates gradualism as it is fed by violence."

## 7 Bodies and nobodies

### George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

#### Introduction

The plot of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is disarmingly simple: a personal rebellion tied up in a love story, both of which are crushed by state persecution. Orwell's novel is notable within the dystopian genre for paring back the story to these basic parts; there are no unforeseen twists as in Zamyatin's text, no sense that had the protagonist made different decisions early in the narrative things could have turned out differently as in Storm Jameson's *In the Second Year*. Through this simplification Orwell is able to foreground his presentation of power-worship and terrifying imagery.

Since the publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Orwell's name has become synonymous with the dystopian genre, particularly in the media. Christopher Hitchens (2002, 5) describes the term "Orwellian" as denoting "crushing tyranny and fear and conformism". But the power of the novel is not limited to O'Brien's famous image of "a boot, stamping on a human face, for ever" (Orwell 1989, 280): a significant part (though by no means all) of the power of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* lies in *how* its story is told. The construction of the novel as a literary work is vital to how the novel engages with the political. As I discuss below, nowhere is this more the case than in the most formally experimental sections of the novel. The narrative strategies of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are at times more subtle and complex than have usually been recognised by critics, whether from backgrounds in literary studies (for example Alok Rai (1990)) or the social sciences (for example Kumar (1987)).

The stakes here are high because Orwell's last novel has been enormously influential, both within the dystopian genre and more diffusely in cultural life and world politics. In addition to Newspeak terms such as "Big Brother" and "doublethink" even the term "Orwellian" has become the sort of cliché that Orwell himself railed against in the essay "Politics and the English Language" (1998, 17:429). Indeed, if according to the *OED* online edition "Godwin's Law" states that "as an online debate increases in length, it becomes inevitable that someone will eventually compare someone or something to Adolf Hitler or the Nazis", I wish to posit Stock's Addendum, *viz.* that as an online debate increases in length Godwin's Law has a direct, positive correlation



with the probability of someone invoking the terms “Orwell”, “Orwellian”, “*Nineteen Eighty-Four*” or “Big Brother”, (and with much the same effects).

The rhetorical manoeuvres mapped by Godwin's Law and Stock's Addendum share similar dangers: like the invocation of the horrors of the crimes of Nazism, drawing an analogy between a particular form of fictional world-making and political reality risks being read as mere hyperbole. Nevertheless, the widespread use of the term “Orwellian” demonstrates that many readers continue to have extraordinarily affective reactions to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. For scholars across the humanities and social sciences, the politics of Orwell's fiction is important to how we conceptualise and think about a variety of themes that go well beyond this one author's work. It is my wager that while the catch-phrases and images of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have resonated across the broader culture, so too has its fabula.

This chapter begins with a discussion of how Orwell integrates concerns connected to literary modernism, naturalism and the utopian/dystopian tradition into his novel. I argue that Orwell's intervention into world politics is concerned with the intersection between the global and the everyday lived experience of the individual, embodied subject. Orwell's engagement with the politics of literary form and especially modernists like T. S. Eliot is important to this end. With these formal concerns in mind, the rest of this chapter connects important elements of the imaginative story world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to the temporal structure of the novel, to show the importance of these formal literary dimensions to the novel's engagement with political ideas. A modernist concern with everyday experiences of an embodied subject is central to Part I of the novel. Part II is constructed around the dialectic between a romantic affair and a formal analysis of world politics, mediated through nostalgic domesticity. Building on this exploration of embodied thought and action, Part III deals with the loss of political *and* bodily autonomy under political torture. By studying arrangements of time and space in the novel I aim to accomplish two things: first, to interrogate the structure of feeling which I argue is key to understanding the relationship of the novel to the conditions of its production, and secondly to thereby assess the importance of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a discursive intervention in politics.

### **The politics of form: Gissing, Wells, modernism**

Leaving aside the Newspeak Appendix, to which I will return below, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* follows the traditional Victorian three-part novel structure. This is a significant authorial decision that sets it apart from Orwell's other novels.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore reasonable to take Orwell at his word when he writes in a letter to his publisher Martin Warburg that, “this is a novel about the future – that is, it is in a sense a fantasy, but in the form of a naturalistic novel” (1998, 19:149). Taking this quotation as a starting point, Philip Wegner argues that Orwell was influenced by Victorian naturalist George Gissing in particular, and that “in one of his last essays published before his

most famous text, Orwell describes the Victorian England pictured in Gissing's fiction in terms that bear an uncanny resemblance to the 'future' world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*" (Wegner 2002, 189). In Wegner's reading, Orwell's novel seeks to return to a nostalgic vision of the past, and he points to examples of sexism and colonialist attitudes in the book as evidence of its conservative politics.

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* undoubtedly exhibits numerous conservative prejudices, and the influence of Gissing to which Wegner points is indeed readily apparent. I want to suggest however that two other sources complicate the novel's politics. The first and most straightforward of these is the influence of the other naturalists Orwell has in his sights, most notably H. G. Wells, while the second is Orwell's lasting concern with literary modernism. In the letter to Martin Warburg quoted above, it is noteworthy that for Orwell it is precisely the naturalist novel form that made the composition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* "a difficult job – of course *as a book of anticipations* it would be comparatively simple to write" (Orwell 1998, 19:149 emphasis added). It seems likely that the allusion here to "anticipations" refers to H. G. Wells, almost all of whose works, Larry Caldwell (2002, 129) asserts, Orwell had read. Three years before Orwell's birth Wells published his bestselling book *Anticipations* (1900), and it is not unreasonable to assume Orwell was at least familiar with its title. This was Wells's first of dozens of forays into predictive (and often rather predictable) writing on the future. The two writers finally met around 1941–1942, becoming less-than-friendly acquaintances following the publication of Orwell's 1941 polemic essay "Wells, Hitler, and the World State". In it, Orwell had argued that "just the singleness of mind, the one-sided imagination that made him seem like an inspired prophet in the Edwardian age, make him a shallow, inadequate thinker now". Wells's determinist teleology was unable to grasp the attraction of fascism to ruling classes and therefore "a crude book like [Jack London's] *The Iron Heel*... is a truer prophecy of the future than either *Brave New World* or [Wells's] *The Shape of Things to Come*" (Orwell 1998, 12:539, 540; and cf. Caldwell 2002, 131).<sup>2</sup>

Published in 1933, the latter book was written as a future history of the years 1930–2105 as seen from the year 2107. Like London and Huxley, Wells here imagines that things will get far worse before they improve – he sees the Wall Street Crash of 1929 as a decisive date in the history of credit from which the world would never recover, sliding through war and pestilence to a point in the 1950s where the state system has completely collapsed, the global population is halved and subsistence living is the norm. The surviving scattered aviation and shipping industries come to the rescue, keeping the rudiments of international trade going and eventually they gain enough power via their combined monopoly of the means of transport and communication to establish a benign world dictatorship. Over a couple of generations, remaining believers in nationalism and partisan or religious ideologies are wiped out or converted to the ideology of the world state. Eventually the dictatorship withers away, its ruling council being sensible and disinterested enough to

realise that its work is done. This leaves humanity in the hands of capable bureaucratic administrators.

For Orwell (1989, 276), the dictatorship of any such powerful, organised, administrative group was unlikely in the extreme to vote itself out of existence. In direct contrast to *The Shape of Things to Come*, war in Orwell's novel leads not to state bankruptcy but to a sort of nationalised economic stasis, in which the wealth generated within the state is taken from a population who are purposefully made to endure low living standards and used up in unproductive warfare. Although Orwell's understanding of economics appears almost as limited as that of Wells here, his political point is that hate, fear, war and tyranny can be just as self-sustaining as any other political motivation and that politics founded upon such deep-seated emotional values are more likely to succeed in their aims than politics founded on the *values* of coolly disinterested and supposedly "rational" decision-making.<sup>3</sup>

Like Huxley – whose *Brave New World* and *Ape and Essence* were both set in futures that follow global war – Orwell evidently saw something powerful in the eschatological elements of Wells's novels of the future, once declaring that for half a century, "M[ess]rs. H. G. Wells and others have been warning us that man is in danger of destroying himself with his own weapons, leaving the ants or some other gregarious species to take over. Anyone who has seen the ruined cities of Germany will find this notion at least thinkable" (Orwell 1998, 17:321).<sup>4</sup> The context of the recent past, in other words, informed the shape of *thinkable* potential futures. This is important in understanding how future set fictions interact with wider political discourse. Here, the redemptive quality of the Wellsian apocalypse lies in the post-hoc validation of the (self-) destruction of humankind as a step towards a rational and enlightened world-state society. This allows Wells to re-insert the post-Enlightenment teleological narrative of moral and technological "Progress" at the very moment of its total failure. But Orwell denied that such conflict would in any likelihood produce a more enlightened and reasonable humanity as its result: "looking at the world as a whole, the drift for many decades has been not towards anarchy but towards the reimposition of slavery. We may be heading not for general breakdown but for an epoch as horribly stable as the slave empires of antiquity" (1998, 17: 321).

Just as Orwell reacts against Wellsian politics, he also introduces a style that often more closely resembles the modernist experimentalism of the interwar period (which itself was in part a reaction against writers like Wells and Galsworthy).<sup>5</sup> These numerous experiments occur at both linguistic and structural levels. What connects them together and to modernism more broadly is their estranging treatment of what Antonis Balasopoulos calls in relation to literary modernism the "'making strange' of the otherwise all-too-transparent, self-trivializing experience of the everyday". By these means modernist literary experiments move

Toward a profound recognition that invests everyday life, for all its cesspools of boredom or distracted ennui, with a transcendental potential:

Proust's time regained, the vast formal and stylistic ambition of *Ulysses* as aesthetic compensation for the transcendence the novel's actual content everywhere negates.

(Balasopoulos 2014, 281)

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it is precisely Winston's ability to invest his inner life with "transcendental potential" by making-strange his experiences of the everyday that so troubles the Oceania regime. As the at times awkward forays into metaphysics show, at the heart of the power struggle in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the question of individual autonomy (Wegner 2002, 192–97) and a battle over Winston's subjectivity, not his immortal soul (see Stock 2013, 117). Indeed, for Smyer "*1984* [sic] is to a great extent a psychodrama within a single mind", in which "the whole narrative – the settings, characters, institutions, and events – is an objectification of Winston's inner self" (1979, 143). Like modernism itself, Orwell's naturalist text does not mark a significant shift away from the concern with the everyday for which Virginia Woolf satirised Edwardian novelists in *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown* (1924), but rather a growing self-reflexivity with regards to the epistemological act of representation in artistic expression.

### **"Broken images" of the past: Orwell, T. S. Eliot, and the politics of culture**

It is here that Patricia Rae has made a useful connection to the conservative thought of high modernist T. S. Eliot. Rae argues that, "Winston's fatal association with Charrington is an allegory of Orwell's attraction to, and disillusionment with, Eliot's modernist poetics" (Rae 1997, 196). In establishing continuity between the jumble of broken junk in Charrington's shop and the "heap of broken images" in Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* (1922), Rae also points to specific intersections between the old prole Winston drinks a litre of beer with in a pub (with whom Charrington shares parallels) and lines from Eliot's (1915) "Preludes" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" (Rae 1997, 202). She concludes that "Charrington is to Winston Smith as Eliot is to Orwell: a prospective solution to a deficit in history" (1997, 200). Such links are perhaps suggestive rather than definitive, but they point to the important intersection between literary and biographical contexts on the one hand, and political content on the other in reading the novel.

Orwell's personal relationship with Eliot was varied. At the start of his writing career in the early 1930s Orwell failed to secure a commission from the Faber editor for a translation of a French novel or a home for his documentary *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1934). As Sherry notes, a couple of years later Orwell worked direct and indirect references to Eliot into his novel *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), poking fun at Eliot's conservative politics, his Anglo-Catholicism (through clear parallels with the character Reverend Tallboys) and his literary disciples

(in the young character Ralph Blifil-Gordon who writes “sub-Eliot vers libre poems” (Orwell 1986, 3:33; quoted in Sherry 1987, 89–90)).

As Orwell became a more committed socialist writer in the mid-1930s, his relationship to Eliot’s thought became more complex, and at times contradictory. As Rae notes, “some desire for Eliot’s approval never left him, even as his own stature in the literary world grew” (1997, 196). Thus while Orwell convinced Eliot to take part in the series of poetry programmes for which he was responsible on the BBC World Service during the War, he was again rebuffed by Eliot when he turned to Faber in 1944 to seek publication of *Animal Farm* – this time for putatively political reasons.

From an aesthetic angle Orwell continued to admire and respect Eliot’s early poetry, but as Sherry (1987, 87) argues, their views sharply diverged even on themes such as the past with which they were both preoccupied in their literary works. To Eliot, the past represented a storehouse of value realised through the poet’s communion with the literary canon in producing the new. The past should therefore be celebrated even as art is revitalised: as Tim Armstrong (1998, 5) argues, “the past celebrated by writers like Eliot and [Ezra] Pound is radically de-historicized by something akin to commodification”. To Orwell, the value of the past is somewhat different, and it may be understood more precisely as a storehouse of *experience* rather than of value in Eliot’s terms. Kumar contends that throughout the novel “the importance of the past, as the only available storehouse of *alternative values and practices*, is dwelt on” (1987, 297 emphasis added). But in opposition to Eliot the past is dwelt on specifically because of its difficult relationship to history.

The seduction of the pastoral “Golden Country” in Winston’s dream, in which “the boughs of the elm trees were swaying very faintly in the breeze, their leaves just stirring in dense masses like women’s hair” (Orwell 1989, 33) is often read as a fantasy which celebrates a mythical bourgeois past to which Orwell seeks to return. It is significant in this regard that Winston awakes “with the word ‘Shakespeare’ on his lips” (1989, 33), and that later when he sees the landscape that “almost” matches the dream, it is the first week of May (perhaps recalling the line from Shakespeare’s Sonnet 18, “Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May”). But the poverty of this vision should be placed in juxtaposition with the fragments of childhood memories that are grounded in the experience of wartime suffering. In the sequence in which we are introduced to the Golden Country, the vision is preceded by a dream in which “in some way the lives of his mother and his sister had been sacrificed to his own” (1989, 32). The guilt Winston feels at this is rooted somewhere deep in his earliest memories, whereas whatever Winston dreams about the “Golden Country” it is precisely as a *visionary* dream that it is not historically situated. For all of their limitations as the unreliable memories of a long lost childhood, the episodes in which he recounts personal experiences are far more convincingly written. Winston’s own past, which lies in the authorial future, is a storehouse of trauma and broken junk. Its value lies in the way in which it partially reveals how the present has been shaped through historical forces.

In November 1948, just as he was typing up the final manuscript of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell wrote a mostly negative review of Eliot's *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* for *The Observer*, in which he claimed that Eliot's defence of a social class system was not made in good faith, as the book left him feeling

That there is something wrong, and that [Eliot] himself is aware of it. The fact is that class privilege, like slavery, has somehow ceased to be defensible. It conflicts with certain moral assumptions which Mr Eliot appears to share, although intellectually he may be in disagreement with them.

(Orwell 1998, 19:474)

Orwell's contention here that "class privilege, like slavery, has somehow ceased to be defensible", condemns class privilege precisely as a historical phenomenon that belongs to the past, even while it draws a problematic correspondence between the historical experience of slavery and the contemporary experience of class oppression in postwar Britain at a time it was still a colonial power. It is ironic then that Orwell effectively accuses Eliot here of being guilty of a type of "doublethink" on the question of class. Despite this, in the same essay he partially concurs with Eliot's belief that the last half-century represented an era of cultural decline, the perception of which, "seems true when one thinks of Hollywood films or the atomic bomb, but less true when one thinks of the clothes and architecture of 1898, or what life was like for an unemployed labourer in the East End of London" (Orwell 1998, 19:475). In the face of Eliot's cultural jeremiad, Orwell chastises him not with counter-examples of literary works written by working-class writers, but with evidence of rising living standards and economic security. Orwell and Eliot shared an "appreciation for folk culture, and a sense that it was atrophying in the face of popular cultural forms like the cinema and gramophone music" (Rae 1997, 198). Hence, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the cinema is presented as a barbaric spectacle in which crowds jeer at the murder of Jewish refugees on the newsreel, while the "dreadful rubbish" which the proles listen to is "composed without any human intervention whatever on an instrument known as a versificator" (Orwell 1989, 144-45). While they are avid consumers of Ingsoc cultural forms, the proles are no longer cultural producers and hence not actively involved in a key site in which political discourse is shaped.

It is of further significance to Orwell's political project that the description of the cinema is tightly linked with the fantastic absurdity of the Two Minutes Hate: directly after the experience of the latter Winston "had suddenly decided to come home and begin the diary" in which he describes the trip to the pictures (Orwell 1989, 11). In both scenes Winston is part of an emotionally manipulated group audience observing war-related propaganda, and the status of "truth" and "fiction" constantly shifts. The Two Minutes' Hate utilises every cheap cinematic propaganda trick possible to rouse enmity. But lest

this seem too fantastical, the previous night's cinema experience reminds the reader that propaganda and indoctrination take many forms. War films in Britain during the Second World War such as British Pathé's (1945) coverage of the bombing of Dresden – which seems to joke about the destruction caused by the R.A.F. and US Air Force – could be just as dehumanizing. As Zwerdling (1971, 93) notes, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* “use of fantasy is deliberately rationed, and within the fantastic framework there is a good deal of realistic observation”. If the newsreel propaganda is historically recognisable, the ultimate political point lies in the reactions of the consumers of mass culture to such violence. Thus Winston records in his diary that a Prole woman in the cinema interrupted the film, shouting “*they didnt oughter of showed it not in front of the kids they didnt it aint right not in front of kids*” (Orwell 1989, 11 emphasis in original). In the published facsimile of the novel Orwell makes his point more forcefully: crossed out in the typescript are the words “Typical prole reaction – not to care about the thing itself only about its being shown in front of children” (Orwell 1984, 29 [10]).

### **A rationalist world perverted: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Part I**

The diary description of the cinema links political criticism of the Proles and their lack of class-consciousness to the historical content of 1940s newsreels. The fantastic (the Two Minutes Hate) is brought into close contact with a “realistic” – or at least only slightly exaggerated – observation of the contemporary world. This narrative pattern is repeated in Orwell's production of (fictional) space more generally. Orwell reconstitutes London as a dystopian space that is not far removed from his contemporary reality, as can be seen from the first paragraph:

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering with him. The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats.

(Orwell 1989, 3)

Eckart Voigts (2015, 49) points out that the first sentence recalls the opening of Eliot's *The Waste Land* (“April is the cruellest month, breeding/Lilacs out of the dead land...”), which in turn may allude to Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. This “accentuates ironically the loss of English culture as well as the coldness of the regime and the ominous corruption that has created this state of affairs”. The alienating phrase “the clocks were striking thirteen” then immediately arrests the flow of prose before it can even begin. This is not merely a clumsy method of alerting the reader to the future setting of the novel. Indeed the apparent ease with which such a reading could arise is itself instructive: Orwell is playing here with a basic assumption

that the future is more empirically rationalised than the present, which frequently underpins imaginative/fictional writing set in the future. This assumption implicitly relies on an imagined telos or end to history. Orwell rejects this for much the same reasons as Walter Benjamin rejects it in his *Theses on History*: in Jean Radford's (1999, 35) words, such forms of historicism "refuse to consider the present except as a transitional moment en route to the future, and thus deny the constitutive role of the present in the construction/understanding of the past, the present becoming what he terms 'empty homogenous time'". In the future story world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, gone are the traditional, local and idiosyncratic measurements of time and space, weights and measures. The 24-hour clock, like the half litres of beer served in the prole pubs, is unsuited to the embodied needs of humans using them. Lonoff (2007, 35) points to an earlier draft of the novel, in which on entering Victory Mansions Winston talks "to 'the aged prole who acted as porter and caretaker' (Orwell 1989, 3). But Orwell cut the caretaker, leaving Winston alone except for the poster of Big Brother". Winston is an isolated individual in urban squalor; the militaristic order implied by the estranging use of a 24-hour clock lies in sharp contrast to the lone figure escaping the "vile wind", whom the reader immediately sees as unlucky through this association with the number thirteen.

Orwell starts here as he means to go on: in Part I of the novel, the passage of time in Winston's story world is detailed extensively. Winston's first diary entry is dated 4 April 1984, and chapters 1–5 *could* conceivably all take place within 24 hours. The only other date mentioned in the novel is Sunday 2 May when Winston and Julia meet in the countryside in Part II (Orwell 1989, 123), and counting back from here Part I must end around 15 April. The amount of story world time compressed into each chapter varies from thirty minutes to around four hours. As Table 7.1 shows, however, within each chapter Orwell introduces important additional information through extensive use of what structuralist Gérard Genette (1980, 40) calls *analepses*, meaning "any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment". Genette delineates between *internal* analepses, which are within the time frame of the story, and *external* analepses (anterior to the time frame of the story – for instance in a character's childhood).

As Figure 7.1 shows, Part I is concerned with the everyday structurally as well as thematically. From the invocation of clocks striking "thirteen" in the opening sentence, the narrator introduces the "strange newness" or *novum* (Suvin 1972, 373) "by which the work is shown to exist in a different world than that of the reader" (Prucher 2006). This is done in a deliberately incidental style, in which this "thirteen" is notable because it is integrated into the everyday, detailed narration.

This concentration of story time alongside ever-longer external analepses suggests the influence of the sort of modernist techniques developed by Joyce, Richardson, Woolf and others. Orwell's choice of third person omniscient



Table 7.1 Story world time and analepses in Part I of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Chapter	Length in story world time	Event(s)	Most notable analepses
One	35 minutes	Commences diary	Two Minutes Hate
Two	35 minutes	Fixes sink, dedicates diary "to the future or to the past..."	O'Brien's appearance in a dream seven years previously
Three	45 minutes	Dreams of "Golden Country", wakes up, does "physical jerks"	Reminiscences: Winston's childhood, his mother, the murky origins of Big Brother
Four	4 hours to 4.5 hours	Work	Comrade Withers' story
Five	1 hour 10 minutes	Lunch in the canteen	Syme: Prisoners hanging. Parsons: his children's activities. Winston: Julia following him.
Six	?	Diary writing	Katherine (Winston's wife); visit to prostitute
Seven	?	Diary writing	Prole argument over saucepans; Jones, Aaronson and Rutherford.
Eight	c. 4 hours	Drinking in the prole pub, visit to Mr Charrington's shop	Old man's reminiscences

narrator here enables him to take the sort of tour of his fictional society around which most literary utopias traditionally were built, but rather than the explanation for its formation being revealed through dialogue as in, say, H. G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (2005a) or Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (2009 [1888]) here it is accomplished through free indirect discourse: the subject alone with his thoughts, revealing his increasing sense of alienation. This introduces a complex temporality. As we move through the series of events that form the novel's plot, the reader is constantly thrown between different time frames both relating to Winston's own life (his childhood, the photograph of the three "traitors" and so on) and to wider historical periods – particularly the recent past and postwar present in which Orwell wrote.

### Locating the Golden Country

At the centre of this complex temporality is the politically and narratologically important figure of the Golden Country. As it is first introduced to us in a dream sequence, the Golden Country stands outside of the temporality and geography of the story world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: unlike,

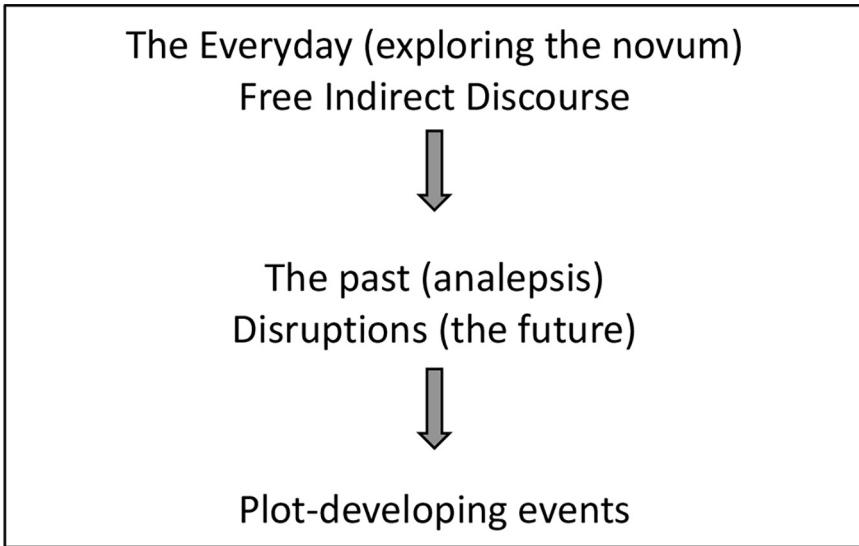


Figure 7.1 The structure of Part I of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

say, the Ministry of Truth, which bears an obvious resemblance to the University of London's Senate House, the Golden Country is a location with no obvious real world concordance, and unlike Winston's memory of an atom bomb falling on Colchester, it is not tied to any specific event. The second time the Golden Country appears is in Winston's waking life, just before he and Julia have sex for the first time. In other words, the abstract vision of the Golden Country is concretised as a space within the temporal present of the novel – albeit that the image is “golden” specifically insofar as it belongs to a nostalgic view of time past. It is also notable that the Golden Country is an explicitly feminised space (hence the “leaves [were] just stirring in dense masses like women's hair”).

The presence of similar scenes in Orwell's interwar fiction suggests that the Golden Country is an idealised image of a rural landscape in Southeast England dating from a time pre-dating Winston's birth: before the Second World War and quite possibly before even the First World War. (Aged 39 in 1984, Winston must have been born in 1945.) The clearing in which Winston and Julia first have sex (Orwell 1989, 130–33), which we learn is half an hour from Paddington station (1989, 121), is remarkably similar to the one which Gordon Comstock and Rosemary go to outside Farnham in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* for a similar purpose (albeit that they are somewhat less successful than Winston and Julia). In *Coming Up for Air* (1939), meanwhile, Orwell strongly connects a comparable landscape of leafy, sun-drenched undulating fields to his character George Bowling's pre-First World War childhood memories. The landscape that in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* could be found near the river Thames has in *Coming Up for Air* vanished under the

asphalt and mean suburban housing developments of the interwar years. Rather than being a place of sexual exploration and fecund sexual imagery, the countryside is nostalgically recalled as a place of sensorial – and to recall the term used in chapter six – especially haptic childhood exploration.

*Animal Farm* (1945) introduces another element to this landscape: the animals' collective farm is a place of work and industry. The "Golden Country" is not a regional landscape such as the sublime fells of the Scottish Highlands or the High Peaks on the Yorkshire/Derbyshire border. The Golden Country is an imagined landscape drawn from Southeast England, which represents some of the most fertile and profitable farmland in Britain. The "close-bitten pasture" of the Golden Country is an ordered and maintained landscape, in which by implication fattening livestock graze. If this is a valorising image of "nature", then it is a comfortable and cosy one in which the human is still firmly in the picture. It is certainly not an image of nature as wilderness, as inhuman, or – to use Rudyard Kipling's famous image – as "red in tooth and claw".

In *Coming Up for Air* George Bowling remembers this pastoral idyll as being "summer all year round", but he importantly admits that he is "quite aware that that's a delusion. I'm merely trying to tell you how things come back to me" (Orwell 2000a, 37). Bowling's memory is a composite fiction of numerous jumbled events. These are located with a certain *fuzziness* in a defined period and location around "Lower Binfield". Bowling is conscious of the problems with this vision in a manner that Winston Smith does not seem to be vis-à-vis the Golden Country. In the context of the imagined future of 1984 this vista represents a rose-tinted perception of an earlier age, which Hannah Arendt called a "golden age of security"; the "period of Imperialism" from 1884–1914 which was marked by "stagnant quiet in Europe and breathtaking developments in Asia and Africa" (Arendt 1966, 123). Orwell's friend Cyril Connelly once called him "a revolutionary who is in love with 1910. Never before has a progressive political thinker been so handicapped by nostalgia for the Edwardian shabby-genteel or the under-dog" (quoted in Bowker 2004, 335). Yet the similarities between the Golden Country and treatments of the pastoral in Orwell's previous novels suggest that he might perhaps have some suspicions of the fabricated nature of the image. While the dream of the Golden Country comes very close to being real for a moment for Winston, the inadequacy of the Golden Country as a locus for hope or change points to a paradox that although empirical truth belongs to the fictional future history of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, neither the implied contemporary reader nor the protagonist within the story world can find a repository of political inspiration in a vision of the past. The Golden Country is a fiction, and a compromised one at that.

## Nature in Oceania

The fiction of the Golden Country is necessary as a means of complicating the idea of the total control of the Party in Oceania. The logic of

Oceanian control relies heavily on the blurring of the line between that which is “natural” and that which is (apparently) inevitable. Nature for the Party is damp rot and infestations, mould, leaks and cold drafts under ill-fitting doors. People are made to live in “sordid colonies of wooden dwellings like chicken-houses” (Orwell 1989, 5), constantly (re-)producing for the benefit of their masters. In contrast to this is the Ministry of Truth, “startlingly different from any other object in sight”, a vast blank pyramid bearing testament to the power and the modernity of the regime: the very antithesis of the decay and corruption of the surrounding streets of London (*ibid.*).

This decay extends to Winston himself, who suffers from a varicose ulcer impairing his mobility and rough skin caused by the “cold of the winter that had just ended”. Pia Maria Ahlbäck argues that the body is an impediment that the state must overcome to control the human mind. “However, the fact that the body will die, and the mind with it (no matter what Oceania legislates), is evidence of the fact that it has been alive, separately and individually” (Ahlbäck 2001, 119). No matter what the Party does to the body, and how it alters the ways in which people (mis)conceive reality, it has existed. The body, as part of nature, *must* exist whether  $2 + 2 = 4$  or 5 or any other number. Bodies can be “disappeared”, their physical being removed as easily as the airbrushing of a photograph or the burning of a letter. Yet inasmuch as the Party needs human matter on which to inflict pain, an instrument on which torture may be carried out, they require something that must be taken out of nature in order for it to be branded with the mark of Oceania. A part of the victim must remain “natural” for her or him to experience the true horror and trauma of torture as a monstrously “unnatural” thing to happen.

To better understand the relationship between Winston’s alienated subjectivity and “nature” it may be productive to turn to the early work of Karl Marx. To Marx, it is only through the body that humans can separate themselves from nature; only through lived bodily experience can nature be seen as something exterior. In a dense passage in the 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx links alienated labour with the human relationship to what he terms “inorganic nature” (Marx 1975, 327). This arresting, unexplained phrase seems to mean that which is neither human nor a product of human creation, including “plants, animals, stones, air, light, etc.” It is the nature that humans are conscious of as nature, and from which they physically live.

The universality of man manifests itself in practice in that universality which makes the whole of nature his *inorganic* body, (1) as a direct means of life and (2) as the matter, the object and the tool of his life activity. Nature is man’s *inorganic body*, that is to say nature in so far as it is not the human body.

(Marx 1975, 328)

Marx, a truly post-Enlightenment thinker, makes humankind master of the Earth. Such rule is only possible through universality: through the ability of the individual to see herself and her own activities within the social body as being representative of such activity in general; to form generalisations from the particular (herself) to the world at large. The individual's relationship to nature (the particular to the general) is here a metonym for the relationship of the whole of humankind to nature (the universal to the general). The difficulty with this presentation is that "nature" is such a vast, unordered "thing", and is as historically, geographically and socially specific as the experience of reality itself. Indeed, to see nature as a *thing* in this way, rather than a vast constellation of interconnected and constantly evolving ecosystems, life processes and physical environments is to reify it.

Marx argued that animals are at one with their vital activity: the thrush which Julia and Winston watch singing in the Golden Country is simply being a bird. Producing bird song is part of what makes it "bird" – it is what it does. Only mankind (in Marx's Victorian gendered terms) can separate himself from his vital activity. Mankind makes his labour an object of his own consciousness and thereby separates himself from what he does to remain alive, to satisfy his physical needs and to remain a physical part of nature.<sup>6</sup> It is one of the many paradoxes of Oceanian ideology that the citizen should believe that nature is something entirely separate and exterior to themselves and the Oceanian State, yet at the same time understand that their own body is part of nature, to the limited extent that there are "natural" and "unnatural" things that can happen to it. The Party's plan to "abolish the orgasm" (Orwell 1989, 280) is a plan to make the population view sexual pleasure as alien and unnatural, as much as to eradicate any bonds of loyalty outside the relationship between the atomized individual and Big Brother.

### **"Where extinct animals could walk": *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Part II**

It is because Winston and Julia treat their first sexual encounter as a part of "natural" embodied experience that they can feel that the climax is "a political act" (Orwell 1989, 133). But this is also why even with a generous reading that sees Orwell as aware of the limitations of the Golden Country, the relationship between Winston and Julia remains highly problematic, for as Chris Ferns (1999, 123) argues what begins as "an anarchic, carnivalesque celebration of desire", settles into something far more "conventional". Their relationship begins with a spontaneous expression of lust and rebellion. By the time of their arrest they have settled into their love nest and "in the end, what is opposed to the massive tyranny of the state is little more than a bourgeois domestic idyll, a brief, fragile dream of quasi-marital bliss" (Ferns 1999, 124).<sup>7</sup> Julia is transformed from the "only truly free individual" in Oceania into a domesticated and motherly housewife – cooking, protecting Winston from the outside world and re-defining her identity in terms of his

patriarchal norms and desires, so that when in the bedroom she applies make-up (a forbidden act for Party members) it is done to please Winston more than to assert bodily autonomy. Hence we learn that, “with just a few dabs of colour in the right places she had become not only very much prettier, but, above all, far more feminine” (Orwell 1989, 149). This transformation leads Ferns to astutely castigate Orwell for falling into the same trap as Zamyatin – that of opposing “to the monstrous sexual conformity of the dystopian state a purportedly ‘natural’ sexuality which is in fact no less socially constructed” (Ferns 1999, 124).<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, it is worth stating that much like the Golden Country, the room at Mr Charrington’s “was a world, a pocket of the past where extinct animals could walk” (Orwell 1989, 157). Space binds a specific relationship between different temporalities together, affecting what is possible within its boundaries. Much like the Golden Country, this space is again strongly reminiscent of scenes in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*.

There was a large, low, broken-backed bed with a ragged patchwork quilt... a deal table ringed by dynasties of teapots; a rickety kitchen chair... The bare floorboards had never been stained but were dark with dirt. In the cracks in the pink wallpaper dwelt multitudes of bugs...

(Orwell 2000b, 231)

Mr Charrington’s room, a non-dystopian space within the dystopian framework of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is just as shabby and insect-ridden. As such it is no more of a realistic or positive alternative to the outer dystopian setting than is “Malpais”, the New Mexico “Savage” reservation, in *Brave New World*. The nostalgia of Orwell’s pre-War working-class interior is ambivalently marked by social prejudice and tempered by the poverty of threadbare, bug-infested sheets and rats that hide in the corner. This couple “are the dead”, ghosts from a forgotten world who can only be happy in the past as long as the present remains hidden.

The world of 1984 is never far away, however, and Winston and Julia are as much accomplices in the Oceanian order as the British were reliant on the impoverishment and exploitation of Africans and Asians in the British Empire for their own (comparatively) high standard of living – a point that Orwell had emphasized in *The Road to Wigan Pier*.<sup>9</sup> This is brought home when Julia “vaguely” states, “there’s been a lot of tea about lately. They’ve captured India, or something” (Orwell 1989, 148), a comment that brushes over the human cost involved in the production of this commodity. If, as Patricia Waugh (2010, 39) suggests, “only the past, symbolized in the glass paper-weight, seems to hold out any vision of the social good”, then this is not to state that salvation can be found in a rose-tinted vision of the past. The tele-screen is there all along behind the etching of St Martin’s on the wall; beneath a feeble idealised representation of the past lies the ever-present power of the modern super-state.

**Love and the practice of oligarchical collectivism**

Winston and Julia's relationship hereby feeds into the other pole around which Part II of the novel is formed; namely the reading of the forbidden book supposedly written by Goldstein, *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*. Both the love story and the forbidden book have their precedents in texts such as Burdekin's *Swastika Night*. Orwell does, however, use these elements in a distinctive way. What makes Orwell's use of the concomitant development of love story and the forbidden book so distinctive is his narrative style and methods, which differ in important respects from those used in Part I of the novel as outlined on pp. 158–9. In Part II time passes more rapidly and disjointedly, with numerous temporal gaps between the events described in individual chapters. Commencing four days after Part I finishes, the first chapter charts nine full days. After the 2 May rendezvous in chapter two, the third chapter references a market-place meeting on 6 May ("four evenings hence" (Orwell 1989, 133)) and one other meeting during May to have sex in the radioactive ruins of a bombed-out church. In chapter four we learn that "Four, five, six–seven times they met during the month of June" above Mr Charrington's junkshop (1989, 157). After this period O'Brien makes contact with Winston. Some days later he and Julia go to O'Brien's apartment and it is not long before Hate Week then commences. They are arrested at the end of the week following Hate Week. In the surviving earlier draft of the novel, Mr Charrington says to Winston "it's a trying month, is August" as he enters the shop for the last time, with the text of *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism* in his bag (Orwell 1984, 184 [195]). But in the published novel no such conversation appears, and the timescale of events could just as reasonably suggest mid-July as the arrest date. Whereas Part I covers a period of less than two weeks, then, Part II covers the events of roughly 11–15 weeks.

The narrative style of Part II is generally more naturalistic, with literary experimentation centering on the 34-page extract from Goldstein's book (which O'Brien later claims to have written). Winston reads the first paragraph of Chapter 1 in bed, when the frame narrator interrupts to inform us that "Winston stopped reading, chiefly to appreciate that he *was* reading, in comfort and safety" (Orwell 1989, 192). He then skips to Chapter 3 (1989, 193–208), before Julia's arrival again interrupts him. Both during their first encounter in the woods and here in the bedroom, carnal knowledge engenders or precipitates political knowledge. Returning to the book after they have been in bed for half an hour, Winston again starts at Chapter 1, this time reading aloud to Julia (1989, 209–26). The repetition of an entire paragraph serves to emphasize the importance of the tripartite split between the "High", "Middle" and "Low" social groups which Goldstein/O'Brien posit form the historical consistent organising principle of societies. But it is noticeable that once again Winston stops reading, this time to check that Julia is still awake. Given Julia's general lack of interest in the book, we can assume that her comment "Go on. It's marvelous" (Orwell 1989, 210) is ironic; indeed she soon falls asleep.

Although Goldstein's text is located in specific temporal relation to the narrated events of the novel, the re-ordering of this text combined with the intrusion of its different narrative voice (i.e. that of "Goldstein" as supposed author) disrupts how we experience time in the story world. To remind us of the effectively paratextual status of the extracts, the narrator interrupts the "reading" on several occasions, pointedly inserting references to the bedroom location in which the text is being read. This is an important development from the earlier extant manuscript of the novel, highlighting the close attention Orwell paid to the formal presentation of the ideas of Goldstein's text. In this early draft, Winston only reads Chapter 1, which is named "*The Genesis of Ingsoc*", rather than "*Ignorance is Strength*" after the Party motto (as it is in the novel). There is no repetition, no interruptions and – interestingly – the tone is perhaps closer to the historical tone adopted in the Newspeak Appendix. For all this, however, and in keeping with dystopian generic conventions, "the genesis" reveals little about the period between the mid-1940s and the (fictional, projected) early 1980s. In a footnote in the facsimile of the manuscript, the editor Peter Davidson notes that these pages were "heavily revised" before publication (Orwell 1984, 196), but such revisions did not fundamentally alter the geopolitical ideas underpinning the section, which are substantially inspired by the ex-Communist turned social conservative James Burnham.<sup>10</sup>

In 1940, Burnham had predicted that after the War three "super-State" empires would emerge, fighting over "what parts and how much of the *rest* of the world are going to be ruled by each of the three strategic centres" (J. Burnham 1962, 165). Although Burnham changed his mind over the course of the War about where these centres of power would lie in the two or three empires he expected to emerge in the post-War world, Orwell concurred with Burnham in 1945 that, "more and more obviously the surface of the earth is being parceled off into three great empires, each self-contained and cut off from contact with the outer world, and each ruled, under one disguise or another, by a self-elected oligarchy". While the borders between these "super-States" were not yet settled, and "East Asia, dominated by China—is still potential rather than actual" Orwell believed that "the general drift is unmistakable, and every scientific discovery of recent years has accelerated it" (Orwell 1998, 17:320).

Chief among these discoveries was the atomic bomb, which presented an opportunity for countries with the requisite economic resources and military industrial organisation to develop such weapons to affect a new balance of power in which nuclear nations would exist in a permanent "cold war" (a term which the *Oxford English Dictionary* credits Orwell as coining). Drawing on Burnham, "Goldstein's Text" argues that the Bomb made large-scale conflict between these states impossible. Instead, the quest for both human and natural resources led to smaller, localised wars from the 1950s onwards – a pattern that was indeed later seen in the conflicts in Korea and French Indo-China/Vietnam.

As an ex-Trotskyist, Burnham's geopolitical analysis ultimately rested on what he perceived to be the economic base of this global system, and as an



outer Party member Winston Smith is part of what Burnham referred to as “the so-called ‘new middle class’, the salaried executives and engineers and managers and accountants and bureaucrats and the rest, who do not fit without distortion into either the ‘capitalist’ or ‘worker’ category” (J. Burnham 1962, 55–56). Burnham held that Marx had inherited a model of the structure of businesses from early economists like Adam Smith, in which an all-powerful owner-supervisor-director ran a mill or factory from the gangway above the shop floor. By the twentieth century, more complex models requiring greater technical expertise had superseded this model. The state too had grown in its reach and its responsibilities, requiring a vastly enlarged bureaucracy. Arguing against the privileged role of the proletariat within Marxist theory, Burnham contended that it was in fact managers, bureaucrats, salaried executives and the like who represented a real universal class. Their “Managerial Revolution” had begun in the Great War and would be complete by the mid 1960s (J. Burnham 1962, 73). It is not by chance that these dates coincide with the consolidation of Ingsoc Party power in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Moreover, we are told that Ingsoc owes its power to a “new aristocracy” comprising mainly

Bureaucrats, scientists, technicians, trade-union organisers, publicity experts, sociologists, teachers, journalists and professional politicians. These people, whose origins lay in the salaried middle class and the upper grades of the working class, had been shaped and brought together by the barren world of monopoly industry and centralised government.

(Orwell 1989, 213)

This group precisely accords with Burnham’s “new middle class” of technically skilled professionals. But in Part III of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Orwell moves beyond Burnham’s ahistorical and limited conception of totalitarianism in his critique of world politics.

### **The body inside Miniluv: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Part III**

Until the two final short scenes, Part III of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* takes place exclusively within the Ministry of Love. If Part I of the novel mirrors Winston’s growing alienation from Oceania by obsessively recording time, then a key means by which O’Brien attacks Winston’s sense of autonomous subjecthood in Part III is by denying him any means to measure time whatsoever. Within the blank walls of Miniluv, the narrator gives the reader little information as to how long Winston’s incarceration lasts, a point the protagonist first notices when with a growing feeling of hunger he realizes that “it might be twenty-four hours since he had eaten, it might be thirty-six” (Orwell 1989, 237). There is a direct path from this sense of helplessness to the terror of Room 101.

Before O’Brien comes to fetch Winston from his cell he encounters a succession of cellmates in a chapter that builds tension by revealing snippets of

information to Winston (and the implied reader) such as the existence of the terrible Room 101. Winston's cellmates also serve to show how Winston is caught up in a vast state apparatus that is big enough to concern itself with a lowly desk clerk such as himself in a personal manner. First comes a non-political prisoner: a prole woman who, with beer and vomit-smelling breath, tells Winston, "I could be your mother" (Orwell 1989, 240). Next arrives the poet Ampleforth, who tells Winston "there is only one offense, is there not?" (242) Then the Party sycophant Parsons is led in. He has been caught saying "Down with Big Brother" (245) in his sleep – the very same phrase Winston unthinkingly scrawls in his diary in Part I of the novel – and after praising the Party and his daughter for catching him he defecates "loudly and abundantly" (246) in the cell's open, broken toilet. Among a silent group who pass through the cell last is a "skull-faced" man whose eyes appear "filled with a murderous, unappeasable hatred of somebody or something" (246–47), and a "chinless" man is brutally beaten in front of Winston after he tries to give the starving man a piece of bread. Each of the visitors teach Winston (and the reader) something about the lot of a prisoner in the Ministry of Love, and all of them in their different ways plunge him deeper into despair, loneliness and isolation. Before his own torture, Winston must begin to associate himself with these people, both as someone who is guilty and as *something* dirty, decaying and offensive to his own sensibilities. Only then do the guards arrive to start beating him. This early mistreatment prepares Winston by humiliating him and making him feel ashamed of his physical self. This makes it easier for O'Brien to undertake the real interrogation.

In structural terms, the frequent unexplained references to "Room 101" and other terrors to come in these scenes anchor the fantastic and even absurdist conversations between Winston and O'Brien that follow in a more believable experience of incarceration. They show that it requires more than brute force and O'Brien's superior intellect to break Winston Smith. As O'Brien himself puts it: "There are three stages in your re-integration... there is learning, there is understanding, and there is acceptance" (273).

Like the "Physical Jerks" which Winston is made to perform before the telescreen in Part I of the novel, the physical torture which begins when Winston is first hit on the elbow forces him to recognise the body as a central part of his *self*, to recognise that "nothing in the world [is] so bad as physical pain" (Orwell 1989, 251). In a sense, physical pain in Oceania offers positive proof that the individual subject, as distinct from what Hannah Arendt (1966, 311) termed "mass man", still exists. One cannot "doublethink" one's way out of such overwhelming physical sensations. To Ahlbäck (2001, 118), the body is a symbol of the "real" beyond the Party's control, which they wish to tame: "The Oceanian fiction of limitless expansion means... an explicit war against physically living human bodies." Yet Oceania's power is condemned to remain incomplete, because "the body lives and resists through its pure crying existence, however tortured" (2001, 120). However, to maintain its iron grip on power, Ingsoc must perform a careful balancing act

between the need for expansion in order to sustain the Party as a movement on the one hand, and on the other the requirement for human fuel, victims to spend in the brutal exercise of power. The preservation of the human body as a physical site that retains the ability to feel certain sensations beyond the Party's control demonstrates on behalf of the Party to the individual that they are flawed, guilty, and therefore deserving of punishment, humiliation and torture.

The population of Oceania need to be able to feel physical pain in order to know that there is something physically *wrong* with them, to be able, in other words, to pathologise their embodied experience of the world, which will always threaten the Party's power. The attack on Winston's faculty of reasoning in Part III of the novel is two-pronged: O'Brien seeks to show Winston that his model of self, so intimately tied up with his faculty of reasoning (in accordance with the post-Enlightenment tradition) is faulty. But he also wishes to convince Winston that he is ill, that his mistreatment is for his own good: "I am taking trouble with you, Winston... because you are worth trouble... You are mentally deranged. You suffer from a defective memory... Fortunately it is curable" (Orwell 1989, 258). The physical mistreatment is itself the litmus test for this argument. Physical mistreatment proves, in Oceanian terms, that Winston is ill and enables Winston to believe this. But mistreatment is also a cause of the breakdown in Winston's ability to reason. Pain literally prevents him from reasoning. It is the "surgery" which excises the "deranged" faculties within him. The use of violence against Winston is a viciously circular process.

### **The cogito stops**

The dialogue between Winston and O'Brien in these torture scenes focuses on metaphysical questions: the nature of memory, reality, and belief, models of rationality, and the limits and plasticity of that slippery phrase "human nature". I have argued that Part I of the novel entails a modernist exploration of the everyday experience of an embodied subject, and that Part II is chiefly concerned with the dialectic between a romantic affair and the presentation of a formal analysis of world politics, mediated through a nostalgic and problematic domesticity. Building on this exploration of embodied thought and action in political terms, Part III deals with the loss of political and bodily autonomy in a modern world of terror. This is key to the structure of feeling to which the book belongs. Orwell explores the links between historical changes in philosophical modelling of the self and the implications of a modern ideology that undermines the very notion of selfhood. Using the multiplicity of voices which the novel form permits, he probes this question from several angles.

In her magnum opus *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt attempted to tackle the question of how Europe could give birth to the Enlightenment and the Rights of Man as well as a "brutally murderous" form

of politics like totalitarianism (Villa 2000, 3). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* seems to ask the Arendtian question: "Why does the Enlightenment tradition have no answer to O'Brien?" or, put another way, why is Winston so easily defeated by his arguments – why is it that, "[w]hatever he said, the swift answer crushed him like a bludgeon" (Orwell 1989, 278)? Before discussing the novel's answer, there are two points we should note about the question itself: firstly, in posing the problem in this format neither Arendt nor Orwell question the historically dominant reading of the Enlightenment as committed to freedom and rationality. Both are concerned rather with how this impulse could be subverted. This places them in opposition to thinkers such as Adorno and Horkheimer (1997, 6), who held that "enlightenment is totalitarian", with respect to its tendency to attempt to subsume everything it touched to the laws of rationality. Secondly, the way the question is framed within the novel points toward the importance of the literary form as a vehicle for political theorising. Social scientists such as Stephen Ingle (2007) have rightly pointed to philosophical flaws in the basis of O'Brien's argument but the dialogue between them, as I shall show, is tightly bound to the chronotopic context of the fictional torture chamber in which they take place.

To return to the question of O'Brien's dominance over Winston's empiricist thinking, we can read in the conversion of Winston from rebel to penitent the repression of spontaneous action into socially controlled behaviour. This for Arendt was part of the modern human condition (Arendt 1998, 40–41, 45). But by juxtaposing the concrete physical torture of Winston with abstract anti-philosophical argument by a character versed in rationalist philosophy, Orwell links physical domination with domination in the conceptual realm. Hence, while the framing of the question itself is antithetical to Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of the Enlightenment, the answer draws on what we might consider to be an Adornian rhetorical tactic: the scene refuses to separate physical power relations and the activity of political thinking.

Unlike the conversation between Mustapha Mond and Helmholtz Watson in *Brave New World*, the dialogue between Winston and O'Brien offers only the pretence of freethinking debate between autonomous individuals. O'Brien is perfectly willing to explore questions of truth and subjectivity, just so long as they take place within parameters that he rigidly controls. O'Brien structures these debates *as if* they were exchanges between oppositional epistemological viewpoints, when in fact he will only have discussions on his own terms. Put crudely, O'Brien offers an instrumentalised rationalist epistemology that is able to consume Winston's empirical understanding of the world: Oceania is not as it appears, but as the logic of Ingsoc ideology dictates. O'Brien indulges Winston's metaphysical questions (to a limited extent) but regards them ultimately as an irrelevant "digression" (Orwell 1989, 279).

The process of conceptual domination begins to break down Winston once he asserts his existence as a thinking being. Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* here becomes (in Winston's words): "I think I exist ... I am conscious of my own

identity" (272). But since he entered the Ministry of Love Winston has no identity in the sense he intends. Nor has he recourse to causality – to an "ergo". His power of reason, his ability as an individual to frame questions in terms of causality, has come into doubt: interrogation and torture have affected him so severely he almost takes O'Brien at his word. O'Brien dominates Winston's mind to such an extent that the Cartesian introspective construction of the self is displaced and it is O'Brien who becomes the first referent by whom Winston may begin to reconstruct his identity. For O'Brien and the Party "Power ... creates reality, it creates truth" – a position that "can be said to be an extreme form of philosophical idealism" (Fromm 2003, 332). Whether or not this is philosophically tenable is irrelevant to O'Brien's aims – all that really matters to him is the radically pragmatist goal that Winston should construct his identity on O'Brien's own terms (*ibid.*). The confused nature of this thinking is beside the point: O'Brien shows Winston that as he frequently reaches conclusions that are not in accordance with Ingsoc ideology it is his own powers of reason that must be dangerously unreliable. Winston knows, for example, that O'Brien's statement "you do not exist", contain[s] a logical absurdity", but as he knows he could not win such an argument, "what use was it to say so?" (Orwell 1989, 272).

Likewise, O'Brien cautions Winston against empiricism as his senses may very well deceive him (the Cartesian "evil demon" (Descartes 1968, 100) here being the "sickness" which O'Brien asserts Winston is suffering from).<sup>11</sup> Not heeding his warning, Winston continues to press O'Brien by recourse to materialism: "I was born, and I shall die. I have arms and legs. I occupy a particular point in space. No other solid object can occupy the same point simultaneously. In that sense", he asks O'Brien, "does Big Brother exist?" Winston frantically grasps here at the discourse of the physical sciences, empirical Newtonian physics, matter and motion. These accounts of reality are again defeated – not by oppositional theses but by virtue of being irrelevant: "It is of no importance. He exists", replies O'Brien (Orwell 1989, 272).

Richard Rorty argues that the central purpose of this torture is to remove Winston's ability to construct a "coherent web of belief and desire" by breaking apart his faculty of reason. The lever point O'Brien uses for this task is making Winston believe that  $2 + 2$  can equal five. This untruth is chosen because of the symbolic investment Winston gives to " $2 + 2 = 4$ " in his diary in Part I. Breaking Winston's attachment to this belief, Rorty claims, means that he can "no longer justify [him]self to [him]self", and that without this ability to *rationalise*, Winston is "forced to realize that he has become incoherent, realize that he is no longer able to use a language or be a self" (Rorty 1989, 178–79). The final step in Winston's treatment is his re-shaping into a model Ingsoc Party member, but to Rorty (1989, 179), "it is the sound of the tearing, not the result of the putting together, that is the object of the exercise. It is the breaking that matters. The putting together is just an extra fillip." At the subjective level, the symbolism with which Winston invests " $2 + 2 = 4$ " does indeed mean that to make him disbelieve this has profound and far-reaching

personal consequences. However, Rorty's failure to see the profound importance of Winston's conversion speaks to wider issues with his liberal critique of totalitarianism.

Stephen Ingle (2007, 735) drawing on Hannah Arendt, argues that "outside of mathematics, what follows from the statement that  $2 + 2 = 4$  is—nothing".<sup>12</sup> Even if Winston's symbolic investment of  $2 + 2 = 4$  as an emblem of "common sense" belies its lack of importance as a philosophical statement, the fact that this becomes a central point of contention shows that O'Brien's goal is not merely to break Winston but to re-make him. Why go to the effort of preparing Winston for the dialogue through months of mistreatment and torture, interrogation and assimilation into the prison world of Miniluv, when his spirit and body could be broken by sending him to one of the forced labour camps mentioned at the start of Part III?

The ultimate act of power to which O'Brien aspires is not just to break his captive but for Winston to thank him for destroying him and then offering him a means of redemption, by allowing him to constantly debase and humiliate himself. It is not just that the old thoughts are now impossible, but that the new thoughts are what the Party puts there, and nothing more. As O'Brien insists, "we shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves" (Orwell 1989, 269). The breaking and re-moulding of Winston is one of only a very few avenues for creativity left in Oceania. O'Brien sees himself a morbid type of "artist", who sculpts not from wood or stone but from human beings. O'Brien also claims to be author of the "Emmanuel Goldstein" text *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism* in which he presents a cogent and coherent anti-Ingsoct account of the development of Oceania and the three super-states' world order. O'Brien entirely understands Winston's opposition, but it is irrelevant to the concrete reality of physical torture in the Ministry of Love.

O'Brien's "creative" work as torturer is comparable to that of the eponymous villain of H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), who explains to the narrator visiting his island that "these creatures you have seen are animals carved and wrought into new shapes. To that – to the study of the plasticity of living forms – my life has been devoted" (Wells 2005b, 71). Moreau first changes the animals physically by breaking their bodies, transforming them into new, human shapes with re-moulded brains. He then completes (so he believes) the ultimate act of power by giving them "the Law" – a catechism with which he tries to impose on them a new moral and ethical consciousness, a whole belief structure. Similarly, O'Brien breaks Winston's body, and in the ultimate act of power he gets inside Winston's psyche and transforms his whole consciousness, his personality, his individuality, that which makes him human. At the same time, he sets up a new Law, "an agency within him to watch over the individual's dangerous desire like a garrison in a conquered city" as Freud (2001, 21:124) described the super-ego in *Civilisation and its Discontents*.<sup>13</sup> Ahlbäck (2001, 118) shows that when O'Brien shows Winston his tortured body in the mirror it is in Lacanian

terms, “the mirror of a sadistic symbolic order, the mad Law of a mad Father”. The Law (as the Lacanian *Nom du père*) can be similarly seen in action in the novel’s final scene, when we are told that Winston “pushed the picture out of his mind. It was a fake memory. He was troubled by false memories occasionally. They did not matter so long as one knew them for what they were” (Orwell 1989, 309).

The fact that the Inner Party can bring Winston back to the memory of his betrayal just by playing a recording of a song with the lyrics “under the Chestnut tree/I sold you and you sold me” and thereby humiliate him is not the final end for which he is tortured. The tears in Winston’s eyes suggest instead that he has been made to feel genuinely grateful for this humiliation. He has been reconstituted as a masochist – whereas he previously felt sorry for himself, for the Victory Gin and varicose veins, the boredom and daily humiliations, he is now thankful for precisely these very attacks and pains he is made to suffer.

### **Newspeak Appendix**

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* does not finish with the words “The End”, but rather with the Newspeak Appendix which itself ends by looking forward to the year 2050 as the date fixed for the final adoption of Newspeak (Caldwell 2002, 135). Margaret Atwood enflamed debate over the diegetic status of the Appendix when she pointedly borrowed the structure for her dystopian novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), subsequently arguing that

The essay on Newspeak is written in standard English, in the third person, and in the past tense, which can only mean that the regime has fallen, and that language and individuality have survived. For whoever has written the essay on Newspeak, the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is over.

(Atwood 2003)

The debate over whether Winston’s conversion means that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a despairing novel, or else the Newspeak Appendix implies hope is unlikely ever to be satisfactorily resolved, as “not only is it impossible to determine where or when in the novel’s chronology the “Appendix” fits, or who its narrator may be in relation to the ‘main’ narrator, but it is impossible to say how it came to be written and appended” (Caldwell 2002, 135, and see 1992, 338). Rather than enter the debate over how to read this uncertain ending, I want to look at what its terms say about how our anxieties and hopes about the future inform our expectations of political novels. If there is insufficient textual evidence to settle the matter definitively, it is because the question underpinning it is how readers actively participate in the creation of a fictive future history using the clues Orwell provided. That a novel about the end of individual autonomy should commence such debate about the path of future history is surely generative.

Orwell wrote many essays, several pamphlets and three book-length documentaries. Had he wished to present a single predictive viewpoint on the future of world history, he was amply capable of doing so using the skills of a seasoned journalist and his varied lived experience. In Raymond Williams's words, "Orwell [was] much more than a passive figure in this dominant structure of feeling. He shared it, but he tried to transcend it ... He was the writer who put himself out, who kept going and taking part, and who learned to write as a function of this precise exploration" (R. Williams 1971, 89). Orwell chose to write an experimental dystopian novel, stretching the capacities of the form through the inclusion of Goldstein's text and "The Principles of Newspeak" Appendix. The novel form permits unique advantages for the political writer; Orwell was well aware of many of these. One such advantage for any political writer is the ability to present a multiplicity of voices. The third person omniscient narrator enables Orwell to mingle satire, social commentary and critiques of a variety of political ideologies *as well as* a warning about the future. In this warning was both despair and hope. There was despair for the complicated path of history that had led from the Enlightenment promise of a future founded on peace and reason to the Nazi death camps, and seemed to be heading only toward further terrors. Despair too that the postwar world had replaced many of the problems that had led to war with new, potentially more dangerous ones. Yet even in this despair there was, implicitly, hope in the notion that this fictional world was after all only *one possible world*, that in history as in the novel there are a multiplicity of voices and potentials. Despite the presentation of the future as containing an inherent potential for evil, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as a dystopian fiction, also expresses the belief that a better future is worth fighting for. The next chapter examines questions about futurity in greater detail by moving from consideration of narrative structure as pursued above to examination of style in the Cold War dystopian fictions of John Wyndham. In the context of nuclear standoff and brinkmanship, Wyndham's fiction more explicitly combines pessimism and utopian sentiment in equal measure.

## Notes

- 1 *Burmese Days* (1934) is split into 25 numbered chapters, *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935) is split into five 'chapters' (each with several numbered sections), *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying* (1936) comprises twelve numbered chapters, *Coming Up for Air* (1940) is split into four parts, and the children's-novel length *Animal Farm* (1945) is split into ten chapters.
- 2 The diaries of an observer of their first meeting recall the elderly Wells taking Orwell to task over this essay. Half a year later Wells's somewhat curter rejoinder to another Orwell essay on his fiction in a marginal note was "read my early works you shit" (quoted in D. J. Taylor 2004, 305). Caldwell (2002, 129) summarises Orwell's critique of Wells as follows: "he seeks to denude the facile nature of Wells's faith in progress and hence in the inevitability of utopia; he wishes to chastise Wells for his glib embrace of catastrophic chiliasm as a means to utopian



- ends; and he undertakes to interrogate Wells's notions of history and time, especially insofar as these seem to entail an ineluctable recidivism".
- 3 In his 1946 review of Zamyatin's *We*, Orwell (1998, 18:14) argued that in Huxley's *Brave New World* "[t]here is no power hunger, no sadism, no hardness of any kind. Those at the top have no strong motive for staying at the top ... life has become so pointless that it is difficult to believe that such a society could endure".
  - 4 Orwell visited Germany for *The Observer* in 1945.
  - 5 Caldwell (2002, 134) argues that Orwell used Wells as a "straw man" after the manner of "senior Modernists" including Virginia Woolf, painting a picture of Wells that failed to adequately represent him.
  - 6 Karl Popper (1966, 2: 102) refers to this as a "dualism" in Marx – a view that the thinking mind conceives of itself as a different type or form of matter from that of the body.
  - 7 The extent to which this is a "bourgeois" domestic ideal is questionable: it could also be read as a romanticised ideal of a working-class interior, as presented in Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1987, 106–7).
  - 8 This social construction of sexuality reflects misogynistic attitudes Orwell indulged in both in his life and in his writing. See Kristin Bluemel (2012, 24–25).
  - 9 "Under the capitalist system, in order that England may live in comparative comfort, a hundred million Indians must live on the verge of starvation – an evil state of affairs, but you acquiesce in it every time you step into a taxi or eat a plate of strawberries and cream" (Orwell 1987, 148).
  - 10 As I have previously noted (Stock 2016, 434–35 n. 6) Orwell considered Burnham's work in detail in his journalism in the years he was planning and writing *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: in 1944 he heavily criticised Burnham's works *The Managerial Revolution* (1940) and *The Machiavellians* (1943) in *Tribune* and *The Manchester Evening News* respectively (Orwell 1998, 16:60–64). By Orwell's October 1945 essay "You and the Atom Bomb" finds some general places of agreement with Burnham (Orwell 1998, 17:320). In "Second Thoughts on James Burnham" (May 1946) Orwell castigates Burnham's "worship of power" and "cowardice" (Orwell 1998, 18:268–84 here 278), only to praise Burnham's "intellectual courage" in his 1947 review of *The Struggle for the World* (1946) (Orwell 1998, 19:99). Although Orwell's views were inconsistent, he generally regarded Burnham as a man whose "picture of the world is always slightly distorted" (Orwell 1998, 19:104).
  - 11 Orwell's exploration of affective morality contrasts markedly with both the post-Cartesian rationalist tradition and more avowedly Christian arguments for religious sentiment as the basis of morality. Kant's attempt to construct morality from *a priori* principles of reason, in which God formed the cornerstone by which "moral action and natural law can entirely converge" (D. Burnham 2000, 25) was perhaps the clearest example of such an attempt to turn ethics into a system of universalisable rational judgement by unifying both of these traditions. But Winston has no sense of religious (or indeed patriotic) duty (just as he lacks a sense of the patriotic "duty" in which he is supposed to be socialised). Moreover, the Ingsoc regime impinges upon the concept of "free will" at every turn.
  - 12 This is true, albeit that Ingle's ascription of the argument directly to Orwell, rather than his fictional character Winston Smith, blunts the force of the point.
  - 13 A similar scene occurs in Zamyatin's *We*, one of Orwell's direct inspirations for *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The process can also be seen in Karin Boye's *Kallocain* (see pp. 128–30).

## 8 “Life in all its forms is strife”

### The Cold War nuclear threat and John Wyndham’s pessimistic liberal utopianism

#### Introduction

The last chapter addressed George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as an early Cold War text through close attention to its critical framework, aesthetic presentation and narrative structure. Orwell’s text, as I have argued, is often taken as an ur-text for the dystopian genre, and certainly the proliferation of dystopian titles in the 1950s suggests that it bore influence in literary imaginations throughout the Anglophone world and beyond. This chapter concentrates on the fiction of another figure whose imaginaries spoke to many of the fears and anxieties of the age, and whose work belongs to the same structure of feeling identified in the previous chapter. John Wyndham mixed and adapted conventions of the dystopian genre with tropes, fantastic premises and material transformations from science fiction (SF). The novelty of his work lies in the elegant adaption of an explicitly Wellsian style to contemporary concerns.

As a writer actively searching for commercial success in the genre market, Wyndham approached storytelling as a craft. As I argued in the introduction, the act of storytelling is never an ideologically neutral act, and values and assumptions are closely bound up with narrative form. Discussion in previous chapters has ranged across different forms of stories including allegory, myth, modernist experiment and naturalism. To further develop this concern with the relationship of genre and politics, I want now to focus on the bond between literary style on the one hand and generic conventions and tropes on the other. In so doing I aim to pursue historical investigation into the declining relevance of liberalism in the postwar, nuclear-armed world. In the decade following World War II, Wyndham felt the traditional mainstays of secular liberal individualism were in retreat, trapped between the interventionist politics of Labour socialism and Soviet Communism to the left and paranoid McCarthyist nationalism to the right. Wyndham gestured frequently toward positive political models in his work such as the “Sealand” colony to which the protagonists escape at the end of his 1955 novel *The Chrysalids* (titled *Re-Birth* in the US). Yet the overwhelming preoccupation of his postwar fiction is the breakdown of the modern state as a result of both human and alien made disasters: instead of pitting an individual character against the intrusive power

of the modern nation-state (as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) Wyndham explores the reliance of the individual on the modern nation-state by investigating the conditions of its collapse or transformation so that the apparently autonomous individual comes face-to-face with (what Wyndham understands as) “nature”. The smooth prose and cheerful humour of his work masks a deep pessimism about the likely trajectory of world politics, without indulging in unmitigated hopelessness. Politically, these are liberal works of utopian pessimism.

This chapter begins with a brief examination of how Wyndham uses H. G. Wells in his post-apocalyptic SF novels *The Day of the Triffids* (1951)<sup>1</sup> and *The Kraken Wakes* (first published 1953, and published in slightly altered form in the US as *Out of the Deep*)<sup>2</sup>, which is adapted to deal with cultural concerns and social anxieties of the early Cold War. As a 1950s SF writer, a major focus for Wyndham was the potentially apocalyptic nuclear threat of his age. Using unpublished material from Wyndham’s archive I argue that the Bomb is inassimilable into existing cultural frameworks as a properly world-ending threat and in consequence both within 1950s science fiction and within international relations theory of the day, the Bomb was treated as an apocalyptic event beyond which at least an elect few would survive. The consequences of this cultural failure are played out in Wyndham’s post-nuclear holocaust novel *The Chrysalids* (first published 1955, and titled *Re-Birth* in the US), a text which asks probing questions about how both religious discourse and secular politics treat those deemed to be outside the “norm”. In the postwar era, SF writers often criticised the failure of politics to keep pace with technological change. Against the backdrop of McCarthyism and the Cold War Wyndham’s work demonstrates the importance of religious and supernatural imagery to political discourses that otherwise clad themselves in the rhetoric of secularism, rationalism and enlightenment. Specifically, I show how the novel is open to being read as a critique of the newly founded Church of Scientology in the US. Such a reading illustrates how Wyndham attempts to engage with religious and spiritual themes from a secular perspective, and political issues from a moral stance that characterises him as a liberal in the broad English tradition of David Lloyd George and Herbert Asquith. This turns on its head the spiritual quietism of Aldous Huxley, as mapped out in chapter six. Wyndham’s liberalism, by contrast, is outward facing and his outlook is that of a cheerfully pessimistic utopian.

### **Wells, world-building, and “logical fantasy”**

Having previously published genre fiction under the names of John Beynon Harris and John Beynon, after the Second World War the man born John Wyndham Parkes Lucas Beynon Harris restyled his literary persona as John Wyndham. This persona was consciously more Wellsian (E. James 1994, 79). Wyndham invoked Wells as his literary forebear in several published and unpublished articles, interviews, and questionnaires from this period, and he made overt and covert references to Wells in works of fiction including *The*

*Day of the Triffids*. At the thematic level, Wyndham's concern with biology, social relations, and (what were by the standards of his own day) unconventional familial relationships owes a debt to H. G. Wells. In narrative terms, meanwhile, the influence is also apparent: *The Day of the Triffids* begins much like Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898) and *The Invisible Man* (1897) with a seismic change and follows through logically the challenges and obstacles that the main characters face due to this altered state of affairs in an otherwise everyday landscape.<sup>3</sup>

Alongside Wells's influence, Wyndham's experiences of the Blitz in London's Bloomsbury district and his service in the British Army as it advanced across Western Europe following D-Day both profoundly affected his outlook. As Barry Langford puts it in his introduction to *The Day of the Triffids*, "Wyndham had lived through and been appalled by the carnage of war; in *The Day of the Triffids* he records his disillusion with the world his generation fought to realize" (Wyndham 1999, xvi). Wyndham used Wells strategically to try to deal with political and social issues via common SF tropes and narrative themes. For example, in the opening scene of *The Day of the Triffids*, protagonist Bill Masen awakes alone in hospital. Drawing on a familiar trope in future-set fiction, the world has been transformed while he slept.<sup>4</sup> Overnight, the appearance of a fantastic display of green comets in the night sky has blinded most of the world's population, bringing chaos, destruction, and violence. As Matthew Moore points out, drawing on Ketterer (2010), the comets are an ironic inversion of the celestial harbingers of reason in Wells's 1906 novel *In the Days of the Comet* (Moore 2007, 75–76, 78–88).<sup>5</sup> In Wells's novel, the comets release a gas that causes the world's population to fall into a profound sleep, awakening with all of their petty jealousies and emotional irrationalism replaced by a calm sense of reason. In *The Day of the Triffids*, the green lights in the sky prefigure blindness, pandemic fatal disease, and ultimately the downfall of civilisation itself.

What follows in the novel is a Wellsian attempt to logically extrapolate a narrative from this fantastic premise: initial panic on the streets of London turns to fear as gangs move in. After saving the heroine Josella Playton (who at other points is in turn more practical and better able to protect herself than Masen) their attempts to join an elite group of sighted people fails when gangs break into the London University building in which they are camped and kidnap them. From hereon, Masen has to escape and tours various communities organised along different political lines looking for Playton, eventually meeting her at Shirnings Farm in Sussex where they raise a son and adopted daughter alongside a blind couple (a living situation that echoes the experience of evacuations during WWII (including that of Wyndham's partner Grace Wilson)). Defending themselves against the threat of invasive triffids increasingly becomes a fulltime occupation. After a feudally organised gang gives them an ultimatum to join their nascent state, they trick its leader and leave him to be killed by triffids as they stage a "strategic withdrawal" to the Isle of Wight where the elite University group are based.

As far removed as triffids are from reality – or indeed as are any of the other fantastic phenomena in Wyndham's novels, from alien sea-monsters

(*The Kraken Wakes*) to telepathic mutant children (*The Chrysalids*) and cloned Nazis in flying saucers (*Plan for Chaos* (2009)<sup>6</sup>) – the threatening figures in Wyndham's fiction do not behave fantastically; their extrapolation from the original imaginative genesis follows a causal pattern of development along if–then lines. (*If* 99 per cent of the population were blinded overnight, *then* the human population would collapse and species better adapted to the new environment would flourish.) Wyndham therefore saw his work as “logical fantasy” rather than “science fiction”. He associated the former with H. G. Wells. Simon James (2012, 37) argues that Wells's

pre-eminent success in the [fantastic fiction] genre owes much to the way in which he melds with the fantastic material details of the actual... Wells does not violate the perceived laws of reality merely to give greater imaginative liberty to the scope of his narrative, but to comment on and address something in the actual world.

John Wyndham's understanding of Wells's approach concords with that of James, and is revealed in an interview with *The Saturday Times Review*, in which Wyndham stated that Wells asked his readers to only “accept *one* fantastic thing” (Hamilton 1968) before extrapolating from this premise. Wyndham interpreted “science fiction” to mean hard SF, which he traced along a genealogy from Jules Verne's forensically detailed descriptive style to John W. Campbell's insistence that science fiction should accord with the latest knowledge of practicing scientists. Wyndham pointedly did not want to be associated with hard SF. By presenting himself as a literary descendant of Wells, however, he felt able to adapt formal techniques and generic conventions commonly identified as belonging to SF, such as invasion by a fantastic species. Hence in *The Day of the Triffids*, Masen overtly refers to Wells's short story “In the Country of the Blind” (1904), in which a mountaineer finds himself prisoner of a blind tribe. He tells Josella Playton that, “Wells imagined a people who had adapted themselves to blindness. I don't think that is going to happen here—I don't see how it can” (Wyndham 1999, 66). The acknowledgment that *The Day of the Triffids* contains a Wellsian premise simultaneously hints that the narrative will play out quite differently.

Politically, the value of Wyndham's Wellsian “logical fantasy” strategy is that it allows him to use well-established SF tropes as a sublimated means to explore new threats and anxieties. In both *The Day of the Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes* disaster comes from the skies, with consequences that are clearly analogous to those of nuclear disaster. Indeed, through the deployment of covert nuclear references the author attempts to construct a greater air of plausibility: the epigraph from Tennyson at the start of *The Kraken Wakes*, for instance, ends “...fire shall heat the deep;/Then once by men and angels to be seen,/In roaring he shall rise and on the surface die.” Such epical Victorian imagery takes on a new significance when one considers that it was published only ten months after Operation Hurricane, Britain's first underwater atomic

test in October 1952. On the opening page, protagonist Phyllis reinforces this link, observing “‘Mars is looking pretty angry to-night, isn’t he? I hope it isn’t an omen’” (Wyndham 1955, 11). But the “omen” she observes is a different harbinger of war: five red points (an allusion perhaps to the Soviet star) descend from the heavens to the horizon, each “a brilliantly red light as seen in a fairly thick fog so that there is a strong halation” (1955, 12). As they hit the water, the narrator Mike reports that, “a great burst of steam shot up in a pink plume. Then, swiftly, there was a lower, wider spread of steam which had lost the pink tinge, and was simply a white cloud in the moonlight” (13). Wyndham is at pains to ensure that the rest of the novel is framed as a tale about the consequences of the spread of nuclear weaponry in the immediate aftermath of Britain acquiring the atom bomb. The novel tracks the relationship between these world-changing events and the everyday experience of a small group of individual characters in response to their conditions.

The focus on the impact of atomic weapons (as a central object of concern in Cold War international relations) on the lived experience of ordinary individuals can be seen likewise in the earlier text of *The Day of the Triffids*, in which the global spread of the triffids is traced back to an international intrigue which results in the release of a “cloud of seeds” which “looked at first like a white vapour” into the upper atmosphere and are “free now to drift wherever the winds of the world should take them” (Wyndham 1999, 27). The airborne spread of triffid seeds encapsulates socio-biological fears, prescient worries about satellite weapons and invasion anxieties. As with radioactive fallout, the threat the seeds contain may be realised only years after they land.

This figure of the seedpod was a frequent trope in 1950s science fiction for representing anxieties surrounding the power of the atomic bomb and the threat of Communist infiltration and invasion. Like a Communist cell, a seed may lie dormant for a long period before growing into a menace. It is noteworthy in this regard that the publication of *The Day of the Triffids* in the US caught a rising tide of anti-Communism that can be traced back to Senator Joseph McCarthy’s famous 1950 Lincoln’s Day speech in Wheeler, Virginia, in which he claimed to have evidence that 205 known Communists were working in the State Department. The seed is a traditional pastoral symbol of renewal and growth, but when exposed to radiation its springtime connotations can be perverted or mutated into something more subversively sinister. Seedpod imagery therefore proved especially fertile, if the pun may be excused, for alien invader movies such as *Invasion From Mars* (1953) and especially *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), which for David Seed (1999, 134) is the example *par excellence* of “truly paranoid narratives”, because of “the virtual impossibility of distinguishing simulation from original” among the town’s inhabitants. In Wyndham’s novel the triffid threat becomes similarly militarised through the image of a seedpod with murky origins.

The fecundity of nuclear imagery in SF might lead one to wonder why Wyndham preferred to couch his discussion of the Bomb behind thinly veiled symbols. Wyndham did once attempt to write a straight nuclear war novel, of

which three rough drafts of the opening chapter survive in his archive (Wyndham 7/2/13). The reason for his lack of success with such projects is revealed in an unpublished review article he wrote entitled "Science Fiction and Armageddon", in which he stated that in such fiction the "H-Bomb ... is either so devastating in operation that all is destroyed, leaving nothing more to be said; or it turns out to be not quite devastating, in which case the author finds his warning has deteriorated into a modified success story about how-we-beat-the-bomb, and so defeated his intention" (Wyndham 5/3/15). This points to a genuine problem for cultural representations of nuclear war: as a figure capable of not only altering the world but ending it, the Bomb is difficult to integrate into fiction. Indeed, Jacques Derrida (1984, 23) once termed nuclear war "fabulously textual", and a "non-event" in the sense of never having occurred.<sup>7</sup> This "fantasy, or phantasm" to which modern literature properly belongs (and not, Derrida provocatively argues, the other way round) is at the same time conditioned by the rhetoric of previous wars, of "techno-military" discourse and traditional power politics: "between the Trojan War and nuclear war, technical preparation has progressed prodigiously, but the psychagogic [sic] and discursive schemas, the mental structures and the structures of intersubjective calculus in game theory have not budged" (1984, 24).

For Derrida, it is vitally important that the *ahistorical* nature of such political discourse does not cloud our judgement, making us "blind and deaf" to the uniqueness of the concrete historical situation, which cuts through discursive similarities with the apocalyptic and millenarianism, as well as "through the analogy of techno-military situations, strategic arrangements, with all their wagers, their last-resort calculations, on the 'brink,' their use of chance and risk factors, their mimetic resource to upping the ante, and so on" (1984, 21).

Apocalypse comes from the Greek *apo* (away from) and *kalupto* (concealment). It is a means of illumination, exposing, in Evan Calder Williams's (2011, 6) words "the unseen – but unhidden". As James Berger (1999, 26) argues, it thereby clarifies in its destructive moment, "the true nature of what has been brought to an end". Such an ending is as Williams (2011, 5) puts it, "the end of a *totality*, here meaning not the sum of all things but the ordering of those things in a particular historical shape". In other words, apocalypse presupposes a post-apocalyptic re-ordering through a process of upheaval, and "the end is never the end" (J. Berger 1999, 26). Indeed as Frank Kermode (1967, 8) established, part of the enduring appeal of the apocalyptic genre is that it allows us to "project ourselves – a small, humble elect, perhaps – past the End, so as to see the structure whole".

Total nuclear war carries the possibility of being precisely *non-apocalyptic* in the sense that it is simply an end to what Derrida (1984, 28) terms the "archive" of human "symbolic capacity", rendering any attempt to assimilate or "soften" the blow – as cultures do with individual deaths – impossible. In Daniel Pick's words, "whilst it can be anticipated according to the terms of our current language and memory, its actual occurrence would overrun and

obliterate the very possibility of its own retrospective representation" (1993, 7–8). The critical struggle for literature is thus to maintain the apocalyptic revelation of "its own truth" while understanding that its own destruction would be "un-symbolisable" and "unassimilable", and with no symbolic referents possible it would therefore be without proportion (Derrida 1984, 27).

The logical consequence for writers of science fiction and dystopia is paradoxical, and analogous to the instructions given in the third novel of Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* series (*Life, the Universe and Everything*) on how to fly: "the knack lies in learning how to throw yourself at the ground and miss" (D. Adams 2016, 65 emphasis in original). In order to write nuclear holocaust stories successfully, authors must predict the consequences of a nuclear event *and get it wrong*, maintaining the fantasy of post-apocalyptic survival. The nuclear imagination becomes at some level weakly cathartic, because *total* destruction cannot produce narrative.

Faced with this conundrum, in the first half of the 1950s John Wyndham attempted two broad strategies: firstly through symbolic sublimation in *The Day of the Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes*, and secondly via the far-future setting of his post-nuclear holocaust dystopia *The Chrysalids*. The strategy of sublimation allows Wyndham to draw attention to the Bomb as symbolic referent, whereas in *The Chrysalids* the Bomb must remain an unnamed unknown quantity belonging to a past beyond knowledge, as I further explore below.

In common with so many SF writers then, Wyndham remained anxiously obsessed by the Bomb in his fiction. Radioactivity has been extraordinarily useful for science fiction writers. It is the unknown "x" which can account for any premise. But some aspect of the Bomb itself always remains inassimilable and threatens to foreclose the narrative. Wyndham's novels often see the transformation of something supposedly "natural" into an "unnatural" monster, ripping through societal barriers and monstrously intruding upon life. The monstrous is explicable simply by reference to the transformative magic of radioactivity – from the fallout responsible for the mutants and telepaths of *The Chrysalids*, to the radioactive treatment by which zygotes are repeatedly split by Nazi scientists in *Plan for Chaos* to create the race of *herren Volk* of the deranged "Mother".

In a natural world considered to be tamed and *understood* by science, radioactive transformation enabled figures of postwar SF to become dangerous. Radioactivity is the trope *par excellence* for establishing a convincing threat in SF of the mid-twentieth century. For instance, in Christian Nyby's *The Thing From Another World* (1951), a film adaptation of John Campbell's story "Who Goes There?" a scientist reveals that the invader's cellular make-up closely resembles a carrot. Yet the blood-sucking invader is not a simple parody or object of ridicule. Scientists track his approach using a Geiger counter. The counter's beat, like a steadily increasing heart rate, matches the growing fear and unease of the characters at the North Pole base. The inclusion of the radioactive element makes the fear serious rather than camp. It is a fear of an unseen, deadly atmospheric poison that could be released anywhere and at any time, with the



potential to infect the current population and generations to come. Jon Turney (1998, 127) states that, "in the prolonged controversies about the dangers of radioactive fallout of the 1940s and 1950s, two fearful possibilities loomed large. One was an increase in cancer after exposure to radiation, the other the prospect of mutations". These two dangers were themselves only part of the story. In the background of radiation, as it were, other dangers lurked in the shadows. The fecundity of radioactively transformed figures in postwar SF suggests a complex relationship with social fears and anxieties of the Cold War, invasion, migration, changing social conditions and gender roles and the aftermath of World War II.

*The Day of the Triffids* is the first of Wyndham's novels to successfully give voice to these fears and the Bomb underpins a pervasive sense of anxiety throughout the text. Early on as he looks back on the pre-disaster world Masen echoes British PM Harold Macmillan's famous quip "you've never had it so good" by arguing that from an estranged perspective that the post-war world seems "utopian now". Yet even looking back on this world through rose-tinted glasses he is aware that "From 6 August 1945, the margin of survival has narrowed appallingly" (Wyndham 1999, 96). Such fears were confirmed in August 1949 with the confirmation of successful Soviet atomic tests. By 1950, when Wyndham was completing *Triffids*, nuclear weapons were indissolubly linked with the Cold War. When Britain became a nuclear power in 1952 it lent weight to the belief, maintained in the mainstream British press, that despite the break-up of her empire Britain was still a *world power* and an important international actor, if not quite a *superpower* on the scale of the USSR or the USA. Wyndham was still reflecting this belief by the end of the decade, when he authored a space-set science fiction space opera entitled *The Outward Urge* (1959), in which Britain's neurosis about being a declining power persists even during a Cold War race to establish moon bases in the mid twenty-first century with the threat to "prestige" of failing to build a British base being sufficient to drive policy (Wyndham and Parkes 1962, 64).<sup>8</sup>

Such a state of anxiety is profoundly unstable, and Wyndham was still prone at other times to deny these fears on the grounds of the Bomb's utility to the peaceful resolution of problems by political actors who were rationally self-interested. As late as 1962, he suggested that it "could remain a stabilizing factor – and very likely be good for us. The presence of an Omnipotence [sic] powerful enough to curb selfish ambitions is not necessarily a bad thing – as the Children of Israel had to be reminded from time to time" (Wyndham, 5/3/8). Although within ten months such ideas came widely under attack as a result of the Cuban Missile Crisis, this was not an especially idiosyncratic view for the wider period: after the announcement of the Soviet Union's first successful test, *The Times* leader column of 24 September 1949 suggested that the availability of such a powerful weapon to both sides could ensure a more stable peace if handled correctly.

Wyndham's attitude toward the Bomb was contradictory and anxious. Outwardly, he projected a liberal stance affirming the importance of states adhering to the rule of international law and working through institutional

mechanisms to ensure peace. Yet he believed this was only made possible through the illiberal power of the Bomb to act as Leviathan. In *The Kraken Wakes* Russia accuses the West in their every public statement of being "capitalistic warmongers" (Wyndham 1955, 53), too quick to use atomic weapons against the undersea threat. Concomitantly, their ironic declarations that the USSR will "fight unswervingly for Peace with all the weapons it possessed, except germs" (1955, 52) becomes a running joke. Wyndham's satire of Soviet bellicose propaganda seems to point towards him having nagging *realist* doubts about international governance of the sort displayed by commentators like E. H. Carr. Looking back to the interwar period, Carr had argued that international relations was a field in which power trumped moral concerns and as such any international governance was in effect the enforcing of the will of dominant nations: "to internationalize government in any real sense means to internationalize power; and international government is, in effect, government by that state which supplies the power necessary for the purpose of governing" (Carr 2001, 100). Carr considers states to always act rationally in their own national self-interest. This tension between liberalism and realism can be seen in *The Kraken Wakes*: at first the arrival of the underwater "xenobath" threat makes international actors begin to think about acting for the common interest of all, but when the Russian delegation withdraws from an international conference to deal with the threat following a spate of accusations and counter-accusations the narrator comments that there is a "reassuring ring of normality" about the proceedings (Wyndham 1955, 106).

The distrust between the great powers in *The Kraken Wakes* is symptomatic of nervous anxiety about the Bomb in a world where annihilating another country could be seen as rationally self-interested, providing the state in question could find a way to do so without endangering its own population. In the mid-1950s behaviourist and realist theories of Political Science, propounded by the likes of Hans J. Morgenthau, made ambitious claims about the potential of their approaches to "forecast" behaviour (Gaddis 1992, 7–9).<sup>9</sup> Especially influential in the United States, such theories share the premise that international actors are "game players", trying rationally to secure their self-interest whether through the pursuit of co-operation or through competitive action. Thus in any given scenario, "the strategies chosen are based on rational calculation. Rational actors, according to game theorists, (1) evaluate outcomes, (2) produce a preference ranking, and then (3) choose the best option available. These are the essential elements of rationality" (Little 2001, 308). The problem with such a game-based view is that the rules are not fixed as in a board game, and there is a perennial temptation to cheat conventions or find alternate and unexpected strategies. If Wyndham's post-war fiction was premised upon Wellsian questions that began "what would happen if..." then the ultimate "what if" that constantly intruded into his fiction was the escalation of the Cold War, the ultimate social nightmare being the effects of nuclear conflict.

### Purity and dirt

The direct threat of Communism to the US mainland in the immediate postwar era was in reality low, and the Soviet threat was perceived differently than in the UK. Nevertheless, fears of Soviet expansionism, conspiracy and subversion provided justification for the Marshall Aid Plan to the public and Congress alike (Sinfield 1989, 94–95). As Jerome K. Shapiro (2002, 53) notes, America

Did its damndest to *convince* itself that it possessed a secret, and this secret made the country feel unique and more secure. Almost paradoxically, the considerable effort required to maintain the nation's 'secret' and security seemed to enflame latent fears of insecurity and jeopardize individual identity and personal freedoms.

As argued above, the seedpod imagery of popular Hollywood SF films like Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* reflect these cultural concerns with individual identity and beliefs in relation to international politics. The "body snatcher" doppelgangers are automata with monotone voices, incapable of individual, rational thought or the capacity to show "real" emotions such as familial love. Such Hollywood alien invader threats dovetailed perfectly with government discourse, in which support for Soviet Communism is likewise presented as a disturbing and uncanny horror. In 1957 the two came together when Warner Brothers produced a Department of Defense propaganda film directed by George Waggner under the direct supervision of studio head Jack Warner for screening to the US Armed Forces, which was broadcast in 1962 under the title *Red Nightmare*.<sup>10</sup> The nightmare, in which a complacent citizen awakes to find himself in Communist America, draws many parallels with SF "brainwashing" films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and uses the idiom of the alien-possessed American to demonstrate what the take over and break-up of the American family structure by the godless unfree Russian doctrine of Communism would look like. The film's message is that American freedoms must not be taken for granted or Communism will prevail. Only through strict observation of social codes of behaviour is the task of watching for infiltration by a nervous, wide-eyed communist impostor made possible.

The price of freedom in such films is not merely vigilance: the dutiful American citizen is free to do what they like, as long as this involves conforming to existing cultural and social codes and aggressively preventing anyone from acting "differently". The white heterosexual man projected as the normative ideal in these films is free to go to church, watch television, eat his wife's home cooking and enjoy his children's unquestioning obedience – in short, free to live according to a strict patriarchal order. The prevention of the spread of Communism, then, relies upon what Zygmunt Bauman (1997, 6) terms "the Dream of Purity": "a vision of *order* – that is, of a situation in which each thing is in its rightful place and nowhere else". Anything *or anyone* that does not conform to such an order is thus impure, dirty. In fact,

following anthropologist Mary Douglas, Bauman defines dirt *as* disorder (1997, 7). According to Bauman's schema, "'Order' means a regular, stable environment for our action; a world in which the probabilities of events are not distributed at random, but arranged in a strict hierarchy – so that certain events are highly likely to occur, others are less probable, some others virtually impossible. Only such an environment do we understand" (*ibid.*).

A preoccupation with purity is central to John Wyndham's 1955 novel *The Chrysalids*. Set a thousand years after a nuclear holocaust wrecks the northern hemisphere, the novel's protagonist-narrator is a teenager called David who lives in the small, subsistence farming community of Waknuk, in Labrador.<sup>11</sup> Genetic mutation is relatively common as a result of the persistence of radiation, and the community wages an unrelenting war against it, an obsessive dream in which religious salvation is closely tied to the ability to decontaminate one's whole environment. Mutant livestock and crops are destroyed; children born with even a slight deviation from a tightly proscribed norm are sterilized and cast out or killed. David is one of a group of youngsters with a new, unseen mutation – he is a telepath. The plot charts the development of these abilities and the subsequent persecution of the telepaths until a woman from "Sealand" (New Zealand) finally rescues them.

Waknuk, a society at an early modern stage of technological development, knows almost nothing about what occurred before the holocaust they term "the Tribulations". The community's religious "knowledge" is linked to fears for survival in a brutal realm of nature. Their catechism "Blessed is the norm" is an essentially Baconian call in which the known is controllable, and therefore blessed, in a chaotic, largely unknowable world. The uncontrollable elements around Waknuk are the bands of "fringes" people – those with various birth defects who live as best they can in the backcountry where everything is deviational, and hence unique. They are perpetually at war with the puritan communities. These people are (to adapt Bauman's terminology) *Strangers*, the dirt that reminds the puritans of the filth of nature which surrounds them and the possibility that their own children will be declared impure.

Arrangements of time and space in this novel are particularly interesting in mediating between a historic past and post-historic far future: Waknuk is othered as a dystopic "no-place" by the similarities between the authoritarian form of the post-Christian religion practised there and the New England Puritanism of the first American settlers in the early modern period. Indeed, the similarities are so marked that more than one critic has mistaken the setting for New England.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, as Roland Wymer (1992, 29) has pointed out, there are significant similarities between *The Chrysalids* and Arthur Miller's 1953 play *The Crucible*, set during the 1692 Salem Witch Trials and highly satirical of the investigations of The House UnAmerican Activities Committee. In Miller's play, ambiguity surrounds the causes of some events: the line between malicious behaviour and the (attempted) deployment of the supernatural is never made quite clear. Nevertheless, it quickly becomes apparent where the audience's sympathies should lie. In contrast, *The Chrysalids* is more morally

ambivalent. When David's childhood friend Sophie is forcibly sterilised and banished as a deviant for having six toes we are encouraged to have "liberal sympathy" for her plight as a minority in an authoritarian society. Yet Wymer argues that the group of telepaths themselves become increasingly intolerant (1992, 32–33). By the climax it is apparent that the narrative is no longer about toleration of minorities but a fight to the death between different "species", a conflict that is hardened in the mind of the "Sealand" woman who comes to rescue them:

'In loyalty to their kind they cannot tolerate our rise; in loyalty to our kind, we cannot tolerate their obstruction.'... 'They are alert, completely aware of the danger to their species. They can see quite well that if it is to survive they have not only to preserve it from deterioration, but they must protect it from the even more serious threat of the superior variant.'  
(Wyndham 1958, 196)

The brutal struggle for survival is hereby given a sinister edge in the celebration of the telepaths as a "superior variant", which for Wymer (1992, 31) "echoes the rationalisations offered by Hitler" for the murder of the Polish intelligentsia. For a student of Wells like John Wyndham, the question of evolutionary struggle in the aftermath of the destruction caused by fascist regimes was one that could never be left alone: from the late 1940s onward he returned to it repeatedly. It is also a question that despite his recurrent attention Wyndham could never fully and satisfactorily answer. Notwithstanding the discourse of "species" and "variants", the Sealand woman's argument is not precisely Darwinian because a teleological idea is implicit in her argument about "superiority" (it is telling she chooses the phrase "superior variant" rather than, for instance, "better adapted for survival"). According to Darwin's theory of natural selection "there can be no goal toward which evolution is striving" (Bowler 2003, 6). Variants cannot be "superior", only better adapted to survive in a given environment. As T. H. Huxley put it in his 1893 essay "Evolution and Ethics", "what is 'fittest' depends upon the conditions" (T. H. Huxley 2000, 238). *The Chrysalids*, by contrast, seems to follow Katharine Burdekin's proposition in *Swastika Night* (1985, 106–7) – which a reference in Wyndham's archival material shows he had read – that "the life you are yourself is all life... Everything that is something must want to be itself before every other form of life." This applies to the non-telepaths as much as the telepaths. They see themselves as made in God's image, and are therefore *superior* to the "blasphemous" teenagers. Indeed, the novel projects a real sense of ambivalence on the question of whether the telepaths, with their hive-like minds and sense of racial self-satisfaction, are in any real sense "superior". Picking up on textual hints that the Sealand society itself may someday ossify, Wymer (1992, 33) asks, "is the arrogance and ruthlessness of the Sealand woman any real ethical advance on the religious bigotry of Waknuk?"

The bigotry of Waknuk conforms to a coherent value system. The foundationalist belief structure of their religion allows them to assess situations according to moral precepts. All the actions of the community under the patriarchal authority of David's father follow a moral sense of purpose which, however disagreeable, is internally consistent. By way of comparison the Sealand woman's only motivation to rescue the telepaths is to gain the chance to train David's younger sister Petra, who exhibits precocious abilities to project her thoughts. This exceptional rescue mission blurs moral lines. This contrast is underlined when David finds out that his father is with the band of fighters on their way to attack the Fringes people in whose village they are sheltering:

'Purity...' I said. 'The will of the Lord. Honour thy father... Am I supposed to forgive him! Or to try to kill him?'... 'Let him be,' came the severe, clear pattern from the Sealand woman. 'Your work is to survive. Neither his kind, nor his kind of thinking will survive long...'

(Wyndham 1958, 182)

The bleak social Darwinism that she preaches to David, Rosalind and Petra has the imperative only to survive. Rather than face David's difficult ethical dilemma, she commands him to avoid the process of ethical decision-making altogether. The irony is that in going with the Sealand woman to the city over the ocean where the air is full with telepathic communication like the "buzzing of a hive of bees" (Wyndham 1958, 200), and thereby opening himself up to the life of the mind-race, he must forsake the ethical autonomy which accompanied the privacy of his mind that he had previously enjoyed when under the yolk of Waknuk orthodoxy. Indeed, during the final attack on the Fringes people by his father's militia David is compelled to hide away from taking any action by the new voice in his head, a god-like voice from the skies.

Unsurprisingly, the Waknuk outcasts are somewhat irked by the Sealand woman's supercilious colonialist attitude. She forces domineering demands into their conscious thoughts, while treating both the Fringes' people and the Waknuk community as inferior to her own "kind". Her actions literally paralyse the patriarchal social orders of both of these Labrador communities when she disperses constricting plastic strands from her aeroplane over their battlefield. These strands bind and suffocate every individual to whom she does not quickly apply an antidote spray. The telepaths are faced with a choice to respond to her thought patterns and live, or else die with the family members who were trying to kill them.

This difference between the community of the Sealand woman and the community of Waknuk is underlined by the respective ways they each deal with difference. According to Bauman's schema, drawing in turn on the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, there are two ways by which communities like Waknuk or Sealand with strongly held beliefs in an ideal of purity could deal with the threat of variation from the norm (which here is effectively synonymous with disorder). The first is the *anthropophagic* route, whereby the strangers in their

midst are swallowed up, "digested" and made indistinguishable from the norm (Bauman 1997, 18). In Sealand, the woman states, "everybody... *wants* to make [thought-pictures], and people who can't do it much work hard to get better at it" (Wyndham 1958, 145). The Labradorean immigrants will all undergo such training to assimilate into Sealand society.

The alternative is the *anthropoemic* route, whereby the strangers are "vomited" out, thus "banishing them from the limits of the orderly world and barring them from all communication with those inside" (Bauman 1997, 18). Waknuk adopts this route for all individuals with "deviations", whether physical (as with the six-toed child Sophie) or mental (as with the telepaths). For Waknuk the anthropophagic route is simply not an option; it would be much like the Nazis attempting to solve "the Jewish question" (which for them was exclusively a matter of their extraneous notion of "race") through the implementation of forced baptism. Nazism was concerned not with souls (as in the Catholic Inquisition) but with blood. The so-called "Final Solution" was, if Hannah Arendt's literal interpretation of ideology as "the logic of an idea" is correct, ultimately the only "solution" for a Nazi ideologue (Arendt 1966, 469).<sup>13</sup> The adherence to such a perverse logic is one reason she termed the genocide *radical* evil. Couched in the discourse of *survival*, assimilation cannot be countenanced. The watchword by which the religious in this community live is purity. Just as Jews, Communists and homosexuals did not necessarily carry a visible marker until they had a patch sewn on to their clothing or were tattooed with a number, so telepathy is already an invisible difference, one which can be neither exorcised nor assimilated.

The process of searching for these deviants is hence necessarily a process of unmasking, of looking for a reality behind a mask. If we follow Bauman's (1991) argument that the Holocaust was made possible by the processes of modernity, then Wyndham's novel shows the potential for the re-occurrence of persecution based on perceived (but invisible) difference across different historical and social conditions. Around the time the novel was written, such persecution could be found in a very different form again in the systemic hunt for Communists in America under the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. While the Waknuk belief system holds that they must look for evidence and attempt to implicate conspirators through the confessions of those they already hold, the Sealand woman is able to discern who to kill through *lack of evidence*: only those able (and willing) to communicate telepathically with her are saved from suffocation by the constricting plastic strands with which she coats everyone in sight. Even the telepaths cannot refuse her (Wyndham 1958, 188–93 *passim*).

The Sealand woman is able to kill so easily because she believes in a culturally constructed racial boundary between telepaths and non-telepaths. Indeed, because of the telepaths' extra-sensible abilities she argues that the telepaths represent a new *species*. In fact, the evidence points to a rather more complex situation: the telepaths all come from non-telepath families who have passed a purity test and been declared otherwise free from "deviations". Anne chooses

to marry a non-telepath, cutting herself off from telepathic communications and eventually betraying them before killing herself (Wyndham 1958, 92), and her love disputes David's claim that the telepaths all feel closer to each other than they ever could to a non-telepath (1958, 94). Further complicating group loyalties, David's Uncle Axel sides with the telepaths and even murders Anne's husband in an effort to protect their identities despite being a non-telepath himself. All of this suggests that the distinction between telepath and "norm" is little more than a political and cultural construct. We might therefore choose to re-name the ability to "think-share" *ideology*.

### From ideology to Scientology

By reading telepathy as an ideological form, we can interpret Wyndham's dystopian narrative as an intervention into how the SF genre was interacting with world politics and religion in the postwar era: I want to suggest that we can productively read *The Chrysalids* as commentary on the emergence of Scientology from the "Dianetics" movement of the early 1950s into a formal religion. While no archival material exists pointing directly to the movement as a target of critique, Dianetics was first described in the pages of SF magazines with which Wyndham was intimately familiar. Wyndham persistently claimed to dislike the label "science fiction", and to find "hard" SF of the type written by Isaac Asimov and published by John W. Campbell boring. Nevertheless, he had been publishing in American SF periodical titles such as *Galaxy Science Fiction*, *Amazing Science Fiction* and *Future Science Fiction* since the 1930s, and by the 1950s Wyndham was well connected in the SF writers' community. For example, his US agent was for some years Frederick Pohl, a member of Isaac Asimov's "Futurians" group and a talented writer in his own right (his dystopian novel *The Space Merchants* (1953), written with C. M. Kornbluth, is of particular note).

For all his editorial insistence upon scientific plausibility, Campbell began in 1945 to express an interest in ideas of psychology and parapsychology through his editorship of *Astounding* (A. I. Berger 1989, 130).<sup>14</sup> He published parapsychology stories by the likes of A.E. van Vogt and Henry Kuttner, whose "baldy" series of short stories (published in *Astounding* using the pen-name "Lewis Padgett"), were collated in 1953 into the "fix-up" novel *Mutant* (Kuttner 1979). In them Kuttner describes a "decentralized" post-bomb North America where a strain of humanity has become bald and developed telepathy, within a "human" (i.e. non-telepath dominated) world. It is a narrative in which assimilation is pitted against the urge for biological dominance and reason against paranoia; it anticipates *The Chrysalids* in a number of ways. For Edward James (1994, 92), both texts are "not so much about the post-nuclear holocaust world as, in the tradition of Van Vogt's *Slan*, about the ways in which ordinary people react to those who are different and/or superior". Campbell was also responsible for publishing a long article by L. Ron Hubbard entitled "Dianetics: A New Science of the Mind" in May 1950, the



ideas of which would eventually lead directly to the creation of the Church of Scientology in 1954. Albert Berger (1989, 125), citing Barry Malzberg, claims that Campbell was in fact “co-creator” of the idea, and remained supportive of Hubbard, albeit not uncritically, for well over a year as the writer developed and publicized his “auditing” techniques.

Berger contextualises the early stages of the Dianetics movement with reference to the belief, commonly held by the editor and many of the writers and readership of *Astounding* alike, that while the driving force of history was the development of science and technology, human irrationality prevented social and political progress from matching technological advancement. Increases in the destructive capabilities of war-making technology were from this view a reflection of human irrationality overruling scientific progress. Berger (1989, 135) argues that in a situation where destructive technological advances and political hatred went hand in hand, “regardless of the spirit in which he created it, Hubbard’s ‘solution’ was the creation of a mechanism for reducing the irrationality”. As such, Hubbard was building on a well-established theme in science fiction dating back at least to early novels of H. G. Wells such as *The War in the Air* (1908). After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, however, the disjuncture between social and technological “progress” was so acute as to necessitate a complete re-appraisal. During the next few months, “Campbell and many of his readers [grew] increasingly angry at the scandalously low level of Congressional debate on the creation of a permanent atomic energy establishment” (A. I. Berger 1989, 131). They believed that the development of nuclear weapons pointed not to fundamental problems with the social or economic role of science, but to a failure of politics and law. In this context, Dianetics can be seen as an attempt, however flawed, to redress the balance between developments in the hard sciences and those in psychology and the social sciences. According to A. I. Berger (1989, 134), nuclear energy in particular had been used metaphorically by SF writers to stand for

the most powerful of new technologies that could move history forward. Now, not only had the quantum leap of progress not materialized, but in the absence of that social transformation called for in the script, technology posed a serious threat to the continuation of civilization itself.

As we have seen, for John Wyndham the atom bomb was a double-edged sword, “an Omnipotence” which could lead to stability under the right conditions, but only by virtue of its ability to plausibly threaten civilization itself. Such conditions, however, involved the ascendancy of a model of liberal progress based on post-Enlightenment values of reason, for which he held out little hope. By turning the question about human irrationality into a medical-psychological question of post-traumatic stress and dysfunction, Hubbard aimed to use a rationalized system to overcome the flaws of human irrationality.

Notwithstanding this, the discourse employed in L. Ron Hubbard's system of Dianetics places more emphasis on scientific rhetoric than on scientific method, and as such it was analogous to the "hard" SF which Wyndham so disliked. Hubbard proposed, for instance, that the human mind is split between an "analytical" part which is "accurate, rational, and logical—a 'flawless computer'" and a "reactive" part, which holds a "repository of a variety of memory traces or what Hubbard calls engrams. Consisting primarily of moments of pain, unconsciousness or emotional loss, these engrams are burned into the reactive mind and cause us a variety of problems in the present, ranging from neurosis to physical illness and insanity" (Urban 2006, 365).

These ideas echo Freud's analysis of the memory as being like a "mystic-writing pad": a resin or wax tablet covered first by translucent wax paper and then celluloid. The dark resin becomes visible where a stylus makes contact with the celluloid, while lifting the celluloid erases the mark.<sup>15</sup> Building on his work in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud argued in a 1924 article that "our mental apparatus" is like a pad that "provides not only a receptive surface that can be used over and over again, like a slate, but also permanent traces of what has been written, like an ordinary paper pad... The layer which receives the stimuli... forms no permanent traces; the foundations of memory come about in other, adjoining systems" (Freud 2001, 19:230).

Just as Freud hoped that the neurotic patient could be cured by bringing repressed (childhood) traumas into the conscious mind and talking through them, through the "auditing" process of Dianetics, the "pre-Clear" patient, "can erase these painful engrams, by regressing to the original painful event and reliving it, thereby clearing it from his/her reactive mind... once all the engrams have been removed, the patient achieves the state called 'Clear'" "The 'Clear' individual is free from neuroses, and gains "a variety of intellectual and physical benefits, ranging from increased IQ to optimum health and vitality" (Urban 2006, 365).

Beginning with an SF problem – the gap between technological change and social progress – Hubbard moved beyond SF to propose a practical solution utilising a vulgarised Freudian view of memory. But he did not stop there, and "eventually, Hubbard and his students would make even more remarkable claims for the Clear state[.]... such as the ability to communicate telepathically, to see through walls, even to re-arrange molecules to fix appliances like broken coffee makers and air-conditioners" (Urban 2006, 365). In contrast, Freud (2001, 18:181) retained an "unenthusiastic and ambivalent" relationship with telepathy and the occult, and he insisted "[psycho]analysts are at bottom incorrigible mechanists and materialists" (179).<sup>16</sup>

For Freud the permanence of *all* memory traces – not merely traumas – indicates that there is a fundamental link between unconscious memory, mental health and the very formation of identity itself; "engrams" stem only from moments of pain. Contemporary trauma theory tends to view trauma as "an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language and representation" (Whitehead 2004, 3), but in the 1950s Hubbard believed that

"engrams" could be eradicated from the unconscious by bringing them into the conscious mind. As such "engrams" are perhaps analogous to Friedrich Nietzsche's (1998, 42) concept of the development of "bad conscience" as outlined in *Genealogy of Morals*, in which "something is branded in, so that it stays in the memory". In human "prehistory", Nietzsche claimed, mankind "guessed" that "only that which hurts incessantly is 'remembered'". Primitive though this means is, the greater the cruelty the greater the effect was believed to be. For Hubbard, the repression of such pain is precisely what creates engrams, and by becoming aware of these memories, one can remove their effects. Nietzsche, however, believed that not only is forgetting an "active" process but that, constituted as "selective remembering [it is] the recognition that not all past forms of knowledge and not all experiences are beneficial for present and future life" (Ramadanovic 2001, §1).

Moving further towards the esoteric and mythical, in 1954 Hubbard founded the Church of Scientology, which placed less emphasis on achieving "the state of Clear and optimal mental health in this lifetime" and focused instead on what he called the "Thetan" or eternal, spiritual soul of man. Not only engrams from this lifetime, but the lives of scientologists' previous incarnations could now be "audited", for the ultimate "liberation of the Thetan from its bondage to the world of matter, space, energy, and time" (Urban 2006, 366).

On the surface, Scientology promises a schema of spiritual enlightenment fitting with the mid-twentieth-century historiographical view of the Enlightenment, which Hans-Georg Gadamer (1986, 258) referred to as "the schema of the conquest of mythos by logos". Yet the meaning of "logos" is stretched by its almost tautological incorporation into the word "Scientology", and the Church creates its own new religious narratives. Indeed, Dianetics conforms to what Vilfredo Pareto termed "non-logical" action: subjectively logical but objectively illogical.<sup>17</sup> In both of these respects, drawing parallels with the Frankfurt School conception of the Enlightenment, Scientology thus "reverts to mythology" (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997, xvi).

There are obvious parallels here too with the mutant-Christianity of *The Chrysalids*. The "Offences", those animals or plants which do not conform to the "norm" for their type ("that is to say, d[o] not look like their parents, or parent-plants") are ritually burned or slaughtered by David's father like an engram brought to the surface. As "deviations" from the norm they are unassimilable. The prevalence of offences on a person's farm is read as being in indirect proportion to their closeness to God, for "THE NORM IS THE WILL OF GOD" while "THE DEVIL IS THE FATHER OF DEVIATION" (Wyndham 1958, 18). Community patriarchs including David's father ultimately decide what the "norm" is, however, so that a power hierarchy based around esoteric knowledge is inevitable. Unlike Abraham in the Bible, David's father's attempts to kill his son are not driven by a message from an angel. In a society that believes "ONLY THE IMAGE OF GOD IS MAN" (1958, 18) he needs invoke no holier messenger than himself. Waknuk Mutant-Christianity, like Scientology, is about the potential of Man to be God-like if he can only realize his dream of

purity. As Zamyatin (1999, 69) had put it in *We*, “Our gods are here, below, with us... the gods have become like us. Ergo, we have become as gods”.

While there are no direct textual references to Scientology in *The Chrysalids*, it certainly sits at the crosshairs of two of John Wyndham's pet hates: the “hard” science fiction of John W. Campbell, Isaac Asimov and others, which he felt insisted on technical vocabulary that rendered it opaque to the non-initiated, and established religion – particularly anything to do with esotericism, mysticism, a monopoly claim on truth combined with a rigid power structure enforced through ritual and spiritual law.<sup>18</sup> If Scientology were an object of satire for Wyndham in *The Chrysalids*, then the fact that those with telepathic abilities (which Hubbard allegedly claimed could be reached through Dianetics) are themselves persecuted by religious fundamentalists would be an irony indeed.

### The dystopian thought of a liberal utopian

In his engagement with the main currents of SF and Cold War politics, John Wyndham was critical but not exclusively negative. As argued above, Wyndham's oeuvre demonstrates thematic, methodological and stylistic connections with the work of H. G. Wells. Some of the links here may be negative: in a letter held in his archives dated 14 April 1954 (Wyndham 21/2/28), written in response to mail from a fan about *The Day of the Triffids*, Wyndham claimed that in an earlier draft he had attempted the more openly Utopian project of writing about life on the Isle of Wight, but later rejected this move because it “looked like a pill of preaching hidden among the rest”. The later utopias of Wells had a highly didactic tone and Wyndham stated in his response to another fan letter on 20 November 1951 (Wyndham 12/2/4) that he wanted to avoid producing “a very dull bog of sociological dissertations” at all costs – which was also the very reason his attempts to produce a sequel never got far.

I argue that, while he actively avoided writing a formal utopia, Wyndham's work is underpinned by utopian thinking, which reflects liberal political values. Such values tie Wyndham to a specifically English liberal tradition that stretches back through the social reforms of David Lloyd George and Herbert Asquith to the political philosophy of J. S. Mill. What Wyndham perhaps brings to this tradition is a more cautious reliance on a normative teleology of progress. As stated above, in common with many American SF writers Wyndham believed that technological advancement had accelerated beyond social and political progress, leading to an ethical deficit. This deficit causes Wyndham much frustration. The catastrophic disasters that befall the world in many of his novels are chances for renewal and the revealing of the path to a better organized, more productive and socially cohesive way of living. Such thinking may be termed *utopian speculation*.

The most overtly utopian of Wyndham's novels is *The Outward Urge* (1959). It is also stylistically the weakest, imitative of Wells's *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933) and the starry adventures of Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men* (1930). In it, Wyndham imagines that following the construction of

space stations in the 1990s, the USSR, the US and the British establish military moon bases by 2020. In 2044 nuclear war breaks out, rendering most of the northern hemisphere uninhabitable. Brazilian hegemony, with Australian rivalry, ensues. Brazil claims space as a colonial "province" (Wyndham and Parkes 1962, 100), but after a disastrous first Martian landing does little to exploit it beyond annexing the space stations circling Earth together with the remaining ex-British moon base. It falls to private enterprise to overthrow Brazilian interplanetary dominance. Space, the novel preaches, should be conquered not by competitive states seeking military advantage or imperial prestige, but by beneficent "privateers" for the good of humanity (Wyndham and Parkes 1962, 137). Rather than entities in space being annexed for one nation or another, at the climax Brazilian extra-terrestrial supremacy is successfully usurped by an Australian of Brazilian descent, who announces "Space will declare itself an independent territory – if the word 'territory' is valid in the circumstances" (1962, 167). The *raison d'être* of the human exploration of "Space" (now capitalized due to its status as a sovereign power) is no less than its systematic exploitation – just as it was in the *Collier's* text of "Revolt of the Triffids". The space race is even explicitly compared with Pope Alexander VI's dividing up of the New World between Portugal and Spain (147). Despite romanticising the desire to explore the Solar System, once "out there" the protagonists (all successive male descendants of the Troon family) proceed primarily to look for natural resources with economic value. Rosy-eyed views of the heavens mask a ruthlessly self-interested and atomistic conception of humanity. When quizzed on their motivation for exploration, each of the Troons invokes the final lines of Rupert Brooke's poem "The Jolly Company":

... for all the night  
I heard their thin gnat-voices cry  
Star to faint star across the sky.  
(Brooke 1970, 139)<sup>19</sup>

The "outward urge" to which the novel's title alludes is a deep psychic longing to be at one with the lonely stars of the poem in the unlimited vastness of space, to be a lone patriarchal adventurer of the final frontier: singularly dedicated, rational and emotionally untouchable. This becomes a gendered cosmic synecdoche for the human condition, where every man remains, "*In his lone obscure distress/Each walketh in a wilderness*" (*ibid.*).<sup>20</sup> In Wyndham's novel, however, the "distress" is hardly "obscure" at all: a recurring theme is the death of Troon characters leaving behind unborn or infant sons, condemned to live in the shadow of their fathers until they in turn take to space exploration. The masculinity of the Troons is defined by absent fathers, and it is this rather prosaic condition that cuts off each individual successively from the rest of humanity.

Colonialist traders who claim to explore space "for its own sake" or for the sake of "science" whilst guiltlessly exploiting uninhabited areas finally put these Oedipal anxieties to rest. Their ascendancy ends international conflict and

establishes the liberal utopia of "Space" as a non-territorial, internationalist body acting simultaneously as the world's policeman. This is not a replacement UN body: international relations remain peaceful thanks to the decrees of an all-powerful nuclear-armed body of monopoly capitalists beyond any democratic control. The novel ends with an episode in which a Troon is found cryogenically frozen in space near the planet "Psyche" 50 years after going missing. When revived he believes himself to have lost his soul. Much as with Alfred Poole in Huxley's *Ape and Essence* explored in chapter six, the "Outward Urge" comes full circle and is revealed to be a psychological question, and one that is deeply entwined with the construction of masculinity.

David Ketterer's analyses of Wyndham often rely on biographical and psychological explanation.<sup>21</sup> The absent fathers which he finds in *all* of Wyndham's other postwar novels feature in *The Outward Urge* even more keenly. In each generation there is a breakdown of authority and an increase in uncertainty followed by a rite of passage in which the son becomes an autonomous man. Ketterer is perhaps correct that the sharply felt absence of Wyndham's father from 1911 (when he was eight) had an effect upon narrative strategies in his fiction. More significant to this study, however, is the political and religious impact of fatherlessness in the novels. Put another way, the psychological question of what fatherlessness in the novels says about Wyndham is in the end a question of authorial intent, but the return to psychological questions about masculinity demonstrates a wider point about how Wyndham uses the novel form for political discussion. Individual characterisation is used throughout his novels as a means to explore the embodied social experiences of political and social change. As Owen Webster (1975, 41) has shown, Wyndham's treatment of fatherhood and the construction of masculinity casts light on the interplay between form, narrative, and the representation of social and economic forces in his work.

In her influential essay "The Imagination of Disaster" Susan Sontag (2001, 215) asserts that, "the lure of such generalized disaster as a fantasy is that it releases one from normal obligations", and furthermore that the ruination and desertion of cities in postwar SF represents "Robinson Crusoe on a worldwide scale". In the case of John Wyndham, the reality is subtly different. For example, in *The Day of the Triffids* protagonist-narrator Bill Masen behaves in consummately Crusoe-like fashion in considering his bourgeois self-interest in the immediate aftermath of the blindness pandemic. Over his fourth (hic!) brandy and cigarette of the morning, he muses that, "My mother and father were dead, my one attempt to marry had miscarried some years before, and there was no particular person dependent on me..." (Wyndham 1999, 47). But the peculiar, persistent sense of "release" he claims to feel is in bad faith. Even before the disaster, as a single professional man with no family ties Masen was free of personal responsibility. It is not so much personal issues that have been solved as social and political ones. As Masen puts it, "I was emerging as my own master, and no longer a cog... I would no longer be shoved hither and thither by forces and interests that I neither understood nor cared about" (47–48). The lesson that he quickly learns in

facing the horrors of a dying London is one that both Mike and Phyllis in *The Kraken Wakes* and David in *The Chrysalids* understand from the start: when existing state structures begin to give way, survival depends on being part of a social group founded on common interests. The narrative path of the protagonists in Wyndham's novels do not typically follow a rugged individual's quest for survival in the manner of Robinson Crusoe. Rather it is through their relationships with a small group of survivors that they are able to thrive in the post-disaster environment. Masen, for example, assumes familial responsibilities almost as quickly as he sheds any pre-existing wider social ones.<sup>22</sup>

In the highly patriarchal story world of *The Chrysalids*, meanwhile, it is noticeable that the figure of the autonomous male is consistently undermined through a plot that often hinges on the actions of female characters. Opposition to the religious authorities is highlighted early on when David's Aunt Harriet attempts to switch his sister Petra with her own baby to prevent it from being declared a "blasphemy"; when she fails she commits suicide. Petra's commanding telepathic abilities are soon after awakened and the subsequent chapter deals with the telepath Anne's decision to marry a "norm". Petra's distress signal causes the telepaths to meet face-to-face together for the first time (significantly it is the more resourceful and practical Rosalind who shoots the wild animal attacking Petra's pony with bow and arrow while David has yet to cock his gun). As they escape, Rosalind kills a man whom she finds stalking them while David is sleeping. At this point Petra establishes contact with the approaching Sealand woman, while the Fringes people take David, Rosalind and Petra hostage. Sophie re-emerges to free them from captivity by murdering a guard after it is hinted at that Rosalind is in imminent danger of being raped, placing Rosalind's safety above loyalty to her tribe. Finally, amid the battle between the Fringes people and the Puritans, the intervention of the Sealand woman brings about the denouement of the novel. While women are subjugated and frequently suffer terrible violence at the hands of this patriarchal society, the structure of the novel works to oppose these forces by demonstrating women's powers as agents to drive the narrative forwards. If the telepaths have a privileged form of knowledge that undermines the religious basis of Waknuk society, then the women of this society have powers of praxis that work counter to the hegemonic patriarchal order too.

Wyndham uses his fiction to attempt to work through a series of political issues to which he never finds satisfactory answers. His political instincts were both liberal and internationalist, and notwithstanding archival evidence suggesting he may have voted Labour in the 1945 landslide election,<sup>23</sup> he responded directly and critically to the postwar British settlement which had included a massive expansion in the roles and reach of the State. Across the Atlantic Wyndham saw the paranoia of McCarthyism, while in Eastern Europe the USSR was continuing to assert dominance. The values of the liberalism to which Wyndham adhered seemed everywhere in retreat. The responses of some SF writers had been politically regressive, yet the reasoning he gave for

frequently disowning SF even as he continued to write it was largely aesthetic rather than political. Nevertheless he felt the same frustrations as leading American SF writers about the gap between instrumental technological development and political events (especially within international relations), which ran counter to his normative liberal understanding of “progress”.

At its best, Wyndham's fiction both structurally and thematically works to challenge and question dominant political positions of his day such as gender roles. But at other times Wyndham's own imagined solutions to postwar political crises were not necessarily any better: in the abstract utopia of *The Outward Urge* Wyndham creates a “privateering” Leviathan figure to de-escalate the face-off between superpowers. Elsewhere Wyndham proves susceptible to social Darwinian fantasising about the survival of elites in a post-disaster setting. This can be seen, for example, when the narrator of *The Kraken Wakes* asserts that “life in all its forms is strife” (Wyndham 1955, 180). On such occasions Wyndham seems caught in the problems of a rather muscular form of late-nineteenth-century post-Darwinian liberalism.

While these political contradictions threaten to fatally undermine Wyndham's project, it is a liberal-Darwinian understanding of humanity that enables his protagonists to thrive. Hence in *Day of the Triffids* the complex of emotions that Masen feels at his newly found autonomy is most revealing in the fact that it links together a lack of family ties to an absence of all authority, be it parental, the State, or religion. The utopian aspect of the novel lies in Masen's rejection of absolute autonomy to become a co-operative and co-dependent member of a new “family”, one that bonds together and remains together through intellectual exchange and the shared values of liberal reason as opposed to the traditional obligatory hierarchies of the patriarchal family. In *The Chrysalids* likewise, the journey of the protagonists takes them from being a persecuted minority to being an enlightened and tolerant group of reasoning, autonomous thinkers. Wyndham chimed with the mood of his times because of his cheerful pessimism: he hoped for little and expected less in the political climate of the early Cold War. Nevertheless, his fiction retains a political commitment to a problematic form of utopianism grounded in the tradition of liberal reformers.

## Notes

- 1 The novel was first published in abridged and altered form as a serial in US weekly *Collier's* as “Revolt of the Triffids”. Doubleday published a longer but significantly altered version of *The Day of the Triffids* shortly thereafter, before the release of the definitive UK text by Michael Joseph later in the same year. For an exploration of the importance of the differences between these editions for understanding Wyndham's work as a whole, see Stock (2015b). Here, I refer to the British Penguin paperback editions of Wyndham's text (which follow the Michael Joseph text) unless otherwise stated.
- 2 I refer here to the British Penguin paperback edition of *The Kraken Wakes*, published 1955.



- 3 This sort of fantastic naturalist experimentation led Wells toward the nascent discipline of sociology. Around 1906 Wells was arguing for the creation of a project he called "utopography", a mapping of utopian thought which Ruth Levitas (2010, 536) suggests "would generate a sociology of utopia, in which sociology is the dominant narrative and utopia the explanandum". As a normative ideal, the necessarily fictional world building of utopia becomes "a virtual point of comparison" for society in order for the discipline of sociology to be pursued.
- 4 See, for example, Edward Bellamy *Looking Backward* (1889), William Morris *News From Nowhere* (1890), and Wells *The Sleeper Awakes* (1899/*When The Sleeper Awakes* (1910)).
- 5 These images might also recall V-1 and V-2 rocket attacks on London during WWII, although Wyndham was with the British Army in Europe when these attacks took place.
- 6 *Plan for Chaos*, a hard-boiled SF novel, was written before *The Day of the Triffids* but only published in 2009 for the first time.
- 7 Derrida has in mind here the planet-altering exchange of hundred-megaton Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles in what could be termed (with due reference to Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964)) a "doomsday" scenario.
- 8 "John Wyndham" and "Lucas Parkes" were in fact one and the same person. Ostensibly, the decision to market the book as written by a partnership was because of a change in style and content away from the previous novels of the 1951–1957 period.
- 9 At the level of individuals, the CIA infamously took the goal of "forecasting" behaviour to its darkest conclusion in the 1950s, commissioning research into "behavioral modification" that would include torture, hypnosis and drugging. The details of "Project MKULTRA" were later brought to light in the Senate ("Project MKULTRA, The CIA's Program of Research in Behavioral Modification" 1977). Ever since, the episode has proved fertile ground for science fiction to explore what Richard J. Hofstadter (1964) had already memorably termed "the Paranoid Style in American Politics". A recent notable example is the Duffer Brothers' series *Stranger Things* (2016).
- 10 The working title in 1957 seems to have been *Freedom and You*. The film may also have been known at some point as *The Commies Are Coming! The Commies Are Coming!*
- 11 It may be significant that *The Chrysalids* was set in North America rather than southern England, as Wyndham's previous two novels had been, but as a "logical fantasy" there was also a practical reason: Wyndham needed a location remote enough that global nuclear conflict would leave moderate effects, but still lying within the Anglophone area of the West in order to explore and critique ideas of normality and heterodoxy.
- 12 Examples include Aldiss, (1973, 294) and Everett Franklin Bleiler, (1982, 221).
- 13 See Arendt (1966, 470–73) for her analysis of how this interpretation of "ideology" was played out under totalitarianism.
- 14 The *OED* defines parapsychology as "The field of study that deals with paranormal phenomena in psychology." The discipline was founded by J. B. Rhine at Duke University with his text *Extra-Sensory Perception* (1934). For Rhine, the term "parapsychology" was only a "temporary subdivision" from the field of psychology (Luckhurst 2002, 252–53).
- 15 The official website of the Church of Scientology claims that L. Ron Hubbard was introduced to Freudian psychoanalysis as a teenager by an American naval officer who had studied under Freud in Vienna (Church of Scientology International 2017).
- 16 On Freud's changing relationship with telepathy, see Luckhurst (2002, 270–5).

- 17 See Raymond Aron (1967, 2: 111). On Pareto and Aldous Huxley, see chapter three.
- 18 Wyndham once described himself as “so shocked and nauseated” by his first communion after Confirmation into the Church of England at the age of 14 that he had “never been since”. With the understated humour characteristic of his correspondence, Wyndham once wrote of religions, “power tends to corrupt them. Have a suspicion that they may be the Achilles’ heel of humanity” (Wyndham 11/5/3; Rpt in Ketterer 2004, 6). When his friend Biff Barker’s daughter converted to Catholicism and entered a convent, Wyndham wrote her out of his will (Ketterer 2000, 162).
- 19 These lines are quoted in full on page 11, and subsequently referred to throughout the text.
- 20 “Male condition” would be more accurate here: this is Wyndham’s only post-World War II novel without a strong female central role. Brooke’s description of atomized humanity shares interesting parallels with Hannah Arendt’s (1966, chapter 7) description of the Boers, thinly dispersed across the Transvaal at the turn of the century.
- 21 See, for example, Ketterer (2000, 153; 2010).
- 22 For a discussion of the importance of the enlightened elite status of the Isle of Wight commune, see Stock (2015b, 444–47).
- 23 I am grateful to David Ketterer for bringing to my attention the letter in Wyndham’s archive of 17 June 1945 in which he asks for his local Labour candidate’s name as it “may be useful” to know for his postal vote.

# Conclusion

According to Annick Wibben (2011, 43)

As *homo significans* (meaning makers) the world is accessible to us only through interpretations. However, we are also *homo fabulans* because we interpret and tell stories about our experiences, about who we are or what we want to be, and what we believe. Narratives order our world.

To perform this role of ordering, we must assimilate new narratives into existing conceptual frameworks (which may in turn be built on narrative structures). Genre is complex and many-faceted; it is not reducible to a single functional purpose. Still, one way in which we can assimilate narratives is by placing them into genre categories. This book began by asserting that we live in dystopian times insofar as generic conventions and themes of dystopian literature are culturally pervasive and diffuse, and that the genre has become a ready referent for interpreting political events.

To begin to account for *how* and especially *why* this diffusion may have occurred the introductory chapter of this book outlined a novel combination of conceptual apparatus for locating dystopian fiction as a cultural form in relation to politics. Storytelling as a type of meaning making is rarely if ever wholly disinterested and as a literary form dystopian fiction is ideological. Using Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope and Attebury's "fuzzy set" I contend that attention to the genre's *fabula*, its story world and the events which form the narrative can help further understanding of cultural constructions of political debate.

In subsequent chapters, the study of relationships between narrative, the production of space and generic conventions in dystopian fiction has been grounded in discussion of the material conditions of the period in which it was produced. The interdisciplinarity of this approach has underpinned evaluations and insights. The dystopian fictions of the early to mid twentieth century I have investigated occupy a range of political positions but they are tied together as expressions of a structure of feeling that attempts to map and analyse "social experience which is still *in process*" (R. Williams 1977, 132). As such, it has been important to my method to conduct close reading

alongside contextual study of the conditions under which these texts were produced. For example, in “The Machine Stops”, E. M. Forster adopts a narrative strategy of aporia, forestalling the reader’s ability to easily interpret estranging elements of the text. By focusing on the connection between aesthetic and political issues in the story, we have seen how it re-frames discussion of two political scandals whose symbolism shaped the context of European affairs in the first decade of the twentieth century – namely the Eulenburg Scandal and the Dreyfus Affair. The “cosmopolitan” identities of Forster’s Jewish and queer figures represent a queer futurity that counters then dominant models of masculinity.

Forster posits an alternative futurity against the political present. This is significant as among the most important features of dystopian fiction more broadly is its ability to mediate between past, present and future. Dystopian fiction can show how terrors and anxieties of the past and (authorial) present are contingent rather than natural, unfixed and even unstable rather than inevitable. Moreover, the genre’s negativity does not in and of itself imply hopelessness.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Yevgeny Zamyatin’s novel *We* attempts to synthesise utopian thought and satirical critique through an experimental diary structure and a tightly controlled symbolic schema. The novel responds to contemporary politics, cultural change and technology at both the formal level (for example, by mirroring certain cinematic techniques such as the close-up in the prose style), and the level of content (through debate about the contingency and (im)permanence of revolutionary action). In doing so it demands the reader’s investment in the imaginative construction of a politically contingent future, which obliquely engages with the aesthetic theory of canonical western thinkers including Kant and Hegel.

Like Zamyatin’s text, Huxley’s *Brave New World* adopts formal experiments as a strategy to explore historical causality and the manner in which the terms of debate are solidified in political discourse. In Huxley’s novel his “counterpoint” technique is used to highlight the centrality of what I term the *future-as-past* with its expressly fragmented revelations of *future-history* between the authorial present and the main narrated future. The fragmentation makes it possible for Huxley to voice competing viewpoints in his interventions (often satiric) in academic debates in fields as varied as entomology, psychology and economics. Huxley explores temporal relationships both within and beyond his story worlds, and *Brave New World* evidences how the developing genre of dystopian fiction offered a flexible discursive framework with which to deal with processes of historical change.

*Brave New World* also marked an important turning point in the history of the dystopian genre: while Huxley’s targets were wide-ranging and his stance on political issues often ambiguous, texts which followed in the mid-1930s onward were frequently invested in sustained political critique of specific targets through the use of allegory. In Part II of this book Rex Warner’s novel of Marxist education *The Wild Goose Chase*, his second novel *The Professor*, and Storm Jameson’s allegory of the Night of the Long Knives, *In the Second*

*Year*, are addressed through close attention to allegory as a literary mode of expression and rhetorical construct for advancing political arguments. As with Katharine Burdekin's 1930s works, these are politically committed novels that aim to warn the reader about the dangers of fascism to Britain in both domestic politics and international relations. Dystopia is the means by which these authors mediate not only between past, present and future, but also between allegory, myth and the pastoral, each of which forms comes with its own ideological baggage. The significance of chapters four and five lies in how I unpack this in discussing how writers of the independent left in the 1930s critiqued both fascism and the limits of liberal humanism. The combined use of dystopia, allegory, myth, and the pastoral additionally complicates popular understandings of literary periodisation in the interwar period.

During the War itself, dystopian fiction was used among other things as a means to historicise the present, to ask questions about how future historians might perceive unfolding events. The discussion of works by both Warner and Storm Jameson in chapter six underlined the importance and potential dangers of using the triumvirate of allegory, myth and the pastoral to mobilise popular support for patriotic political projects. But Warner's *The Aerodrome* and Jameson's *Then We Shall Hear Singing*, along with Boye's *Kalloccain* and Huxley's postwar *Ape and Essence*, were more concerned with the psychological effects of living through the upheavals of the twentieth century on individuals. Well before Orwell published *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, dystopian fiction was being used as a means for thinking through the psychological implications of the experience of modernity for the individual subject.

By projecting forward into the future to look backward and self-reflexively emphasising the question "how did we get here?" dystopian fictions provide a means for examining not just the central political questions and social trends of the day, but also the values and assumptions underpinning the conjecture of both the projected course of futures and the dominant forces of historical change. Orwell's text adopts a variety of narrative strategies to explore the relationship between the global and the everyday lived experience of the individual, embodied subject. The significance of my investigation of the dialectical relationship between narrative temporality and the production of space here is in revealing the close relationship of aesthetic choice and political impulse. Orwell is interested in how European intellectual traditions which began with the Cartesian turn to the subject could end with the total subsumption of the autonomous subject to the collective totalitarian body. The significance of his discussion of the question lies not so much in any single insight it produces but rather in the arrangement of this discussion within the narrative structure.

The final chapter on John Wyndham's fiction moved slightly away from a focus on narrative structure in favour of a concern with how literary style, generic conventions and tropes are related to political issues. Wyndham's fantastic fiction is both characterised by the Cold War and (re-)produces key Cold War ideological beliefs in the existential opposition of East and West,

the essential alienness of Soviet tenets, and the apocalyptic framework of the Cold War imagination. More than this, Wyndham's fiction grapples with the political problem of the Bomb (as a threat to all life on Earth) as a literary issue (as a symbol which is narratively unassimilable). Precisely for these reasons the Bomb became a problem not only for literary imaginaries but for political imaginaries too, and attempts by SF writers to deal with the Bomb worked subtle influence on the rhetoric and decision-making of policy makers. Whether in the paranoid style of McCarthyism or the spurious rationalism of Scientology, the SF imagination provided a battleground for working through deeply felt anxieties and proposing extraordinary "solutions". The "Age of Anxiety" was an age of science fictional imaginations and military industrial complexes, dystopian narrative fictions and atomic weapons systems. This was an age in which the traumas of the recent past and the political tensions of the present made it hard to imagine forms of alternative futures that were not apocalyptic. Following a dystopian impulse John Wyndham struggled to find a way out of historically determinist fears in his postwar work.

## Legacies

Fittingly, and yet perhaps unsatisfyingly for a book which has spent considerable energy discussing endings, this discussion must draw to a close in the middle. In choosing to concentrate on close-reading selected texts which contributed to a structure of feeling, parts of the dystopian genre have been overlooked, including non-European dystopias and those in other media such as film. Likewise, while John Wyndham showed one very English way in which the dystopian trajectory could be taken in the 1950s by tracing the footsteps of Wells, the US was developing its own dystopian tradition, through novels like Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952), Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants* (1953) and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1954), texts which investigated regimented futures of corporatism and conspicuous consumption.

Beyond the 1950s both the political concerns and the narrative structures of dystopian fiction began to change: the psychogeographic surrealist endeavours of New Wave science fiction, for example, are at some remove from the presentation of telepathy in Wyndham's *The Chrysalids* and it would be difficult to describe them as belonging to the same structure of feeling as *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Likewise, in the years following Rachel Carson's popular science book *Silent Spring* (1962) environmental concerns began to feature in science fictional dystopias with new intensity, such as John Brunner's *The Sheep Look Up* (1972). The 1970s also saw the emergence of what Tom Moylan has named "critical utopias", which respond critically to the history of the genre and "reject utopia as a blueprint while preserving it as a dream" (Moylan 1986, 10). A frequent criticism of dystopias is that "the dystopian narrative itself has all too easily been recruited into the ideological attack on authentic utopian

expression: commentators cite the dystopia as a sign of the very failure of utopia” (Moylan 1986, 8), and critical utopias by the likes of Ursula LeGuin, Joanna Russ, Marge Piercy and Samuel Delany from the 1970s are written against this recruitment, using some of the same tools (such as post-Enlightenment critique) in order to re-assert the importance of utopian thinking.

In the 1980s this is followed by the “critical dystopia” (a term Raffaella Baccolini (2000) uses to describe some earlier works such as Burdekin’s *Swastika Night*, but which both Sargent (1994) and Moylan reserve for the specific “emerging socio-political circumstances of the late 1980s and 1990s” (Moylan 2000, 188)). Moylan (2000, 186) explains the emergence of the critical dystopia thus: “moving beyond the engaged utopianism of the 1970s and against the fashionable temptation to despair in the early 1980s, several sf writers turned to dystopian strategies as a way to come to terms with the changing, and enclosing, social reality”. These writers, such as Octavia Butler, achieve not “an entirely new generic form but rather a significant retrieval and refunctioning of the most progressive possibilities inherent in dystopian narrative” (2000, 188).

I began this book by stating that we live in dystopian times, because the dystopian mode is now a go-to cultural referent for interpreting a wide variety of events and trends from politics and economics to environmental change and beyond. In tracking some of the cultural history of genre I hope to have shown that this is a two-way relationship, one which has contributed to the production of new fiction across an expanding range of media from films, TV programmes and graphic novels to music, games and apps, graphic design and fine art. In the mid-2000s, Fredric Jameson pointed to the rise of cyberpunk (beginning with William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984)) as marking a “general period break which is also consistent, not only with the neo-conservative revolution and globalization, but also with the rise of commercial fantasy as a generic competitor and ultimate victor in the field of mass culture” (2005, 93). Well over a decade since publication of Jameson’s *Archaeologies of the Future* during the militarism of the Bush/Blair years, the struggle in process is now against an ascendant hard right characterised by a series of contradictions: it is headed (and largely funded) by an Establishment elite posing as outsider populists. It tries to divide and co-opt certain parts of minority groups (for example, cis gay men within the LGBTQ+ community) to make a show of its “tolerance” even while savagely persecuting other parts of the same community (for example, trans people). It employs virulently racist nationalism, but often only in coded terms, and some supporters aggressively reject labels of prejudice or racism. In such a situation it is no wonder that we reach for dystopian neologisms like “doublethink”, but neither is it surprising that dystopia’s generic narrative structures are used to provide a means of unpacking bizarre, frightening or overwhelming events.

Yet with the twists and turns of world politics since the turn of the millennium the blending of the dystopian genre with other types of fiction and the diverse areas of culture in which the influence of the dystopian can be found is also logical. The diffuse reach of the dystopian has extended to some

fantasy, for example, and China Miéville has pointed to the “accelerating pace” of genre blurring between forms of fantastic and non-realist fiction (2009, 245). There is additionally an ever-closer imbrication of the dystopian with the post-apocalyptic, so that the rupture between the present world and the dystopia-to-come (usually though not always through environmental or technological disaster) is notably prominent in many recent dystopias.<sup>2</sup>

Dystopian fiction is now routinely used to present more conservative views and while new critical dystopian visions are being produced, they are swamped by the rash of dystopian cinematic franchises drawn from YA (Young Adult) fiction which have occupied cinema screens in the post 9/11 era. Few of these films are open to the “progressive possibilities” of critical dystopias. Typically set against a backdrop of wanton urban destruction that marks it as post-9/11 literature, the narrative of many YA dystopias frequently focuses on a (white, cis, straight, middle-class) adolescent hero figure who has to make important choices about their own future that will affect others. What the protagonist learns in these *Bildungsromane* is not solidarity or class consciousness but rather Emersonian self-reliance and responsibility, and the denouement typically provides closure and catharsis. As Basu, Broad and Hintz argue, such works offer

A gratifying view of adolescent readers as budding political activists—a portrayal that flatters adolescents and reassures adults that they are more than apathetic youth. However, the easily digestible prescriptions suggested by many of these novels may allow young readers to avoid probing the nuances, ambiguities, and complexities of social ills and concerns too deeply. (2013, 3)

Recent bestselling YA dystopian novels – and especially films – carry a message that support for the status quo can help communities to bind together for the common good, no matter how radically estranged the circumstances. As Couzelis (2013, 133) puts it, “some narratives risk making the future look so bad that young readers are grateful for their contemporary society as is”.

It is not all bad for dystopia, however. Genre blending and inventive nuance are being used across a variety of storytelling media to pursue critical forms of dystopia which address the most pressing global issues. As Baccolini argues, “the manipulation of genre conventions and the rejection of high/low culture classification... becomes an oppositional strategy, a site of resistance against hegemonic ideology” (2000, 15). Engaging the dystopian genre has become a versatile method to explore and explode forms of oppression and structured violence including but not limited to those based on gender, sexuality, class, disability, colonialism, race and ethnicity. In the words of Baccolini, dystopia remains

one of the preferred forms of resistance for our times, one that maintain[s] utopia on the horizon and within the pages of the text with a series of



different strategies... Our times need utopia more than ever, but they seem to be able to recover utopia mostly through dystopia.

(Baccolini 2006, 3)

The blackened, poisoned pastures of dystopia, strewn with the debris of the twentieth century – empty tins and bullet casings, newsprint, broken radios and shards of glass – are walked again. Newly scattered detritus is brought into focus. Dystopia continues to haunt the future, tracking the limits and horizons of the most culturally prevalent fears and pressing anxieties. As a politically engaged and dialogic literary mode, it provides a means by which we can interrogate complex relationships between past, present and future. We understand the world in significant part through stories. Dystopian fiction is a culturally diffuse form that helps give shape to how we organise and order thinking about political life. We live in dystopian times.

## Notes

- 1 Notwithstanding this, some examples I have explored, such as Huxley's *Ape and Essence*, do seem to lapse into disturbing political quietism.
- 2 China Miéville (2015) argues that, "apocalypse and utopia: the end of everything, and the horizon of hope... have always been inextricable", but in recent years, "they are more intimately imbricated than ever". Miéville concurs with Evan Calder Williams (2011) that we live in apocalyptic times, but also states that we are living in *someone else's* utopia.

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